Physical Education in the Primary School

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Part One

Physical Education in the Primary School

DISCUSSION PAPER
Physical Education in the Primary School

INTRODUCTION

The contribution of physical education to the personal, social and physical development of the child has been well documented in many research studies (McGuinness & Shelly, 1996). Physical Education (PE) provides children with the knowledge, skills and understanding necessary to perform a variety of physical activities, maintain physical fitness and to value as well as enjoy physical activity as an ongoing part of a healthy lifestyle. In an era in which childhood and adult obesity is on the rise across Europe, PE and a healthy eating lifestyle have the combined potential to make a positive lifestyle change for all.

Not only can PE programmes have a significant influence on the future health of children, but encouraging pupils to take part in a wide variety of physical activities can have many additional benefits for pupils – co-operation in group situations, acceptance of success and failure, concepts of working hard and ‘fair play’ and an appreciation of the skills and attributes of others.

This discussion document looks at the historical development of the concept of physical education, through to the current status of PE as taught in our primary schools. It takes into account the way PE is taught, looks at who teaches it, how teachers are trained to teach it, who pays for it and how it is assessed. Finally, the barriers to implementing the PE curriculum are also discussed and recommendations are made.

Despite the acknowledged importance of PE, primary teachers in Ireland in the 21st century find themselves endeavouring to implement an ambitious PE curriculum in the context of increasingly sedentary lifestyles, ironically juxtaposed with the celebrity status of sports-stars, and equipped with an uneven distribution of resources.
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

International

Physical education is in a sense as old as human society (Willets, 1986). Our earliest ancestors needed to be able to hunt, run and be physically strong to survive; therefore, separate physical fitness programmes were not needed. Gradually, ancient societies in China, Egypt, Greece and Rome adopted physical education as part of military training and the history of physical education frequently shows a pattern of military, social, and political influence.

In ancient Greece, boxing, wrestling, racing, dancing, swimming, rowing, chariot racing and javelin and discus throwing were all popular activities. The Spartans, meanwhile, took physical education to another level: physical fitness, military skills and respect for authority were key, and Spartan boys were trained from seven onwards and ultimately expected to fight in the Spartan armies. Girls were also encouraged to live an outdoor life and to train physically so that they might have strong children. In Rome too, military training was seen as of utmost importance, and soldiers were trained in running, jumping, swimming and weapons training.

During the Renaissance, the revival of learning led to a renewed interest, particularly in Italy, in the original Greek and Roman sources of medical theory and practice. However, the curriculum in English universities and schools of that period appears to have been strongly influenced by an ascetic view of life, and the education of scholars included little, if any, physical education. Physical education was still not encouraged in the older universities of Oxford and Cambridge and playing football was forbidden in Cambridge in 1574, while at Oxford in 1584 any “minister or deacon” convicted of this offence was to be banished and reported to his Bishop (Mulcaster, 1581).

The 20th century brought a different understanding of physical education. For example, the teaching of physical education in schools in Germany during the Third Reich took on a sinister importance, linked, as many subjects were, to racial identity. Following the devastation of Europe after the Second World War, physical education was seen as a necessity for wars and physical training was required to boost “fitness for service” (McIntosh, 1981). By 1967, more than 70 countries had made PE a required subject for boys and girls at one or more levels of formal education but poor facilities were still a major constraint especially among the emergent nations (McIntosh, 1981). In the 60s and 70s the quality and quantity of research in PE increased enormously but had little impact in classrooms. UNESCO published its international charter on sport and physical education in 1978.

From the physical strength needed to hunt for food and survive, to the skills necessary to fight in battle, to the present day where physical activity is seen as a vital element of a healthy life, society has encouraged its members to engage in physical...
activity to a greater or lesser extent. Additional information on historical developments is available in Appendix 1.

**Ireland**

Though Ireland may have a strong tradition in sport, it does not have a long tradition of PE as a curricular subject in schools. “Physical drill” was taught in some kindergarten classes in the late 19th century (Duffy, 1997) though few schools had kindergartens. There was little, if any, physical education in the senior classes. Following a recommendation by the Belmore Commission (1897), physical drill was included in the *1900 Revised Programme for National Schools*. This led to an increase in the number of primary schools offering physical drill, though it took place mostly outdoors (Duffy, 1997). Physical activity was seen as contributing to the health, spirits and general well-being of children and had a role in keeping pupils orderly and in improving instruction (Duffy, 1997). However, following the establishment of the Free State in 1922, the time for physical drill was cut from an hour to half an hour in the *National Programme of Primary Schools* and was no longer obligatory after 1926. During the early 20th century the Swedish system of physical training was used as a basis for the physical drill programme and included references to national games, dancing and health education.

There were no major developments in PE in primary schools until the *1971 Primary Curriculum* was published, which included physical education as opposed to ‘drill’ or ‘training’. The 1971 Curriculum included an emphasis on the areas of movement, games, athletics and other activities. Movement was subdivided into educational gymnastics and dance. Even though movement was seen by the curriculum planners as a very important part of the PE programme the combination of a lack of structured programmes, lack of inservice and confusion among teachers about how it could or should be taught led to games becoming the PE activity of choice. There were notable exceptions where schools acquired gymnastic equipment and had indoor facilities where they could implement an educational gymnastics programme. ‘Other activities’ were classified as outdoor activities of an adventurous nature, such as camping, orienteering, hill-climbing and it was hoped also that these activities would instill in young people a love of nature and promote qualities of leadership, courage and self-reliance. Children should also be taught the principles of life-saving and the kiss-of-life (*Curaclam na Bunscoile*, 1971, p. 293). However, there was no long-term investment in teacher inservice and though the curriculum made recommendations in relation to facilities, PE facilities in primary schools developed in a piecemeal manner. Therefore, PE continued to be under resourced and consequently not taught as originally intended in *Curaclam na Bunscoile 1971*. The *Report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum* (1990) stated that the vast majority of inspectors regarded the syllabus (*Curaclam na Bunscoile 1971*) as being suitable while the majority of teachers regarded
it as unrealistic and demanding excessive expertise. Teachers were not happy with the level of inservice provided following the introduction of the new curriculum in 1971.

The next section describes the current Primary School PE Curriculum. Teachers have had some professional development to support them in planning for the implementation of the PE curriculum so it remains to be seen whether the Primary School Curriculum (1999) will be more successful than the 1971 curriculum.

THE PRIMARY PE CURRICULUM

The Revised Primary School Curriculum was introduced in 1999. The introduction to the Curriculum refers to children learning through the medium of movement with the primary focus on the body and on physical experience (p. 55) and allows opportunities for pupils to gain an understanding and appreciation of physical education.

The Primary Physical Education Curriculum is divided into six strands, as follows:

- Athletics.
- Dance.
- Gymnastics.
- Games.
- Outdoor and adventure activities.
- Aquatics.

Athletics

The athletics strand incorporates a range of activities including running, jumping and throwing. Children begin with the basic movements of walking, running, jumping and throwing and then build on their skills throughout primary school. The pupils are encouraged to extend themselves by running faster and over longer distances. They develop techniques to jump for height and distance. They have an opportunity to improve their throwing skills in both accuracy and distance thrown.

Dance

In this aspect of the curriculum the children express themselves and communicate by creating and performing different movements. The children use their body parts and actions to take a full part in both creative and folk dance. The primary emphasis is on both communication and expression and the children are encouraged to enjoy themselves and become fully involved as creators or simply to appreciate the artistic expressions of others. Folk dancing is an important element of the curriculum as it gives the
pupils an opportunity to experience Irish dancing and compare it with dances from around the world. The emphasis is on involvement and enjoyment of the dances.

**Gymnastics**

This strand focuses on body movement on the floor and using a variety of equipment. As they get better at jumping, turning, swinging and balancing the children sequentially strive to attempt more complex tasks. Children are encouraged to work at their own level and to develop their own potential in a structured manner.

**Games**

All children are encouraged to participate in the games strand. Opportunities are provided for both individual and co-operative skills. The emphasis is on fun and collaboration. Children will adopt games to suit their own skills and abilities. They learn the value of working together to defend, attack, use possession wisely and improving team work. Gaelic games, soccer, basketball and rugby become part of the experiences enjoyed by the pupils and it is hoped that children will participate in or at least appreciate the necessary skills used as they progress through life.

**Outdoor and adventure activities**

This strand may or may not have been used by schools heretofore. It is concerned with walking, hiking, orienteering and other outdoor challenge activities. It can be difficult to implement, so many schools may start onsite by introducing orienteering or map-reading activities. Some schools may have access to water-based activities such as canoeing or sailing. The main focus of this strand is to encourage pupils to appreciate and participate in a variety of outdoor activities.

**Aquatics**

This strand is designed to help all pupils gain confidence and competence in and around water. Water safety is a major aim of the strand. Schools can adapt this strand to their own particular circumstances. Enjoyment of water play and safety are just as important as gaining proficiency in swimming. The key is to allow pupils an opportunity to begin water-based activities.
Implementation of PE

At times pupils are active participants in PE whilst at other times they act as spectators or analysts. Pupils both learn the rules of formalised sports and creatively introduce new rules and tactics to heighten their physical experience.

Although children are given an opportunity to participate in all areas of the curriculum, teachers recognise that children have different physical attributes and strengths, different approaches to individual and group activities and different motivations depending on the activity provided. The goal for teachers is to allow children to improve personal and social development, physical growth and motor development. Competition can adversely affect some pupils and the emphasis, therefore, is on physical education and development rather than sport and winning. Nevertheless, the competitive nature of pupils cannot be under-estimated.

At primary school pupils learn the necessary skills which allow them progress to formalised sport. Developing respect for rules, opponents and officials is a very healthy step. A balanced approach to competition is required. In many schools, there are links to extra-curricular activities and competitions and it is important that pupils, parents and teachers embrace the aims and objectives of the revised curriculum when they progress to activities outside of the school.

Gender equity is an area of considerable importance – boys and girls should be given equal access to the range of activities provided and positive attitudes towards physical education need to be encouraged. Similarly, the special-needs pupils need to experience a range of activities according to their abilities with a view to progressing at their own level.

The recommendations in the revised curriculum are that schools need to introduce a broad-based curriculum which is reflective of the pupils’ abilities and also the availability of resources and the school environment. The class teacher is deemed the best person to teach the physical education programme. Assessment can take place both formally and informally and the revised physical education programme can be integrated with many areas of the curriculum such as maths, geography, music, art, languages and SPHE.

According to 2005 INTO Curriculum Survey, 93% of respondents stated that they taught PE to their classes (INTO, 2008). An earlier study carried out in 2002 by Drewett (2006), carried out in a number of schools in Kildare, had indicated that not many teachers were implementing the Revised PE curriculum, though it must be borne in mind that this survey was carried out before teachers had received inservice in relation to the revised curriculum. In 2005, the various strands of the PE curriculum were available to pupils to different degrees (INTO, 2008). All respondents stated that games were often or sometimes available to pupils in their school while 30% stated that aquatics were never taught. The number of respondents who reported that gymnastics is seldom or never available in their school may be a cause for concern. The majority of
respondents (61%) take pupils swimming during school time. See Table.

**Table 1: Availability of PE strands**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does PE teaching in your school include?</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aquatics</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor and adventure</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many factors impede full implementation of the PE curriculum, including poor facilities, a lack of equipment, large class sizes and insufficient teacher education and ongoing professional development. However, almost two thirds of respondents (62%) to the INTO survey (INTO, 2008) were of the view that standards in PE would improve following the introduction of the Primary School Curriculum 1999.

**Assessment**

As outlined in the Primary School Curriculum: Physical Education (1999), ‘Assessment in physical education informs teaching and learning by providing information on what children have learned and how they learn’. Assessment has a formative role to play in the planning of physical education lessons. Pupils are assessed on their achievements and their readiness to progress to a new activity in order to plan further learning activities for the child to explore. It can be useful to record these observations taking account of the progress of the class, a group or an individual related to the content of the programme. Assessment also indicates areas of learning difficulty for the child. Early diagnosis and remediation of these difficulties can enhance the child’s confidence in approaching new skills. Assessment is helpful when grouping children so that maximum activity for each child is encouraged. Diagnostic assessment is particularly useful in physical education for the child with special needs.

It is not expected that each child is assessed individually in every lesson. Assessment will accumulate over a specific period. Teacher observation is the most useful and most consistently used form of assessment in physical education. Other forms of assessment include teacher-designed tasks and curriculum profiles. Tasks can be designed to assess *process* and *product*. A wide variety of tasks related to individual strands should be used to encourage all children to demonstrate their skills and understanding as well as factors such as their ability to cope with success and failure. Curriculum profiles entail short descriptive statements of pupil achievement in relation to physical education that might be expected of the child at different stages in
his/her development. A record can be kept on each child by highlighting aspects of the statements as they are achieved by him/her. The profile can be used to record progress in written form or as the basis for reporting.

The school policy should identify what should be assessed in physical education and outline ways in which this assessment can be undertaken in a manageable way. Assessment undertaken by teachers provides information on the child’s progress and achievements in physical education. This needs to be recorded and communicated to other teachers, to parents and to other professionals.

According to research carried out by Drewett and O’Leary (2006) in a sample of schools in Co Kildare regarding attitudes and practices in relation to assessment in Irish primary school physical education, 93% of the participants considered assessment in general extremely important/important but only 63% considered assessment in physical education extremely important/important. Only 50% of participants in the research claimed to have read the section on assessment in the physical education curriculum, 43% rarely/never assessed in physical education and only 7% claimed to have a policy statement on what should be assessed in PE.

When asked to identify some of the reasons why teachers did or did not assess in PE, to ensure continuity and progression in the PE programme was the most popular reason given while informing future teaching and learning, diagnosis of difficulties and determining levels of achievement ranked relatively highly. Providing information to parents was the least popular reason given. Just over 25% of participants felt confident in assessing PE in general. Participants felt most confident in assessing games, outdoor and adventure activities and athletics and least confident in assessing dance, gymnastics and aquatics. Only 25% of participants felt confident in knowing ‘what’ to assess.

Teacher observation was the most popular assessment tool used followed by teacher designed tasks. Only 18% of participants claimed to use curriculum profiles always/sometimes. Self-assessment strategies were being used by 66% of participants while 56% reported using peer-assessment strategies. About 20% of participants claimed to have a permanent record of assessment in PE (many indicating end-of-year school report) while only 7% claimed to be recording assessment outcomes on a continuous basis. Identifying what to assess and finding time to record and report were highlighted as major difficulties in assessment. A majority of 68% of participants stated that there is a high need for training in assessment in PE.

Two important themes emerged from the general comments – one relating to whether or not assessment has any place in physical education and the second concerned with the possibility that assessment and enjoyment of physical education are not compatible.
CURRICULUM ISSUES

This section of the report raises a number of issues that have emerged for teachers in the context of implementing the PE curriculum.

Time allocation

The Primary School Curriculum (1999) recommends that one hour per week be allocated to PE. Drewett (2002) indicated that the allocated time for PE ranged from 16 to 45 minutes in the primary schools in the Kildare area, which participated in the study. A small scale study by the INTO in schools in the Munster region in 2005, indicated that the average amount of time spent on PE per week was 54 minutes, and that two thirds of teachers would like to spend more time on PE (INTO, 2006). Though schools have two hours discretionary time, there is no evidence that this time is spent on PE. Curraclam na Bunscoile (1971) didn’t specify a time allocation. However, there was a suggestion that PE lessons in the infant classes should be of 15 minutes duration, depending on activities.

The average weekly timetable for PE in primary schools across the EU is 109 minutes, with most primary schools providing between 60 and 90 minutes according to a study carried out by the University of Worcester, which also indicates that there is a perception that the amount of time that has been allocated to PE has been reduced since 1999. See Appendix 4 for information regarding time allocated to PE in a number of European countries in 1999 and 2006. The Worcester University Study (2007) recommends that “EU countries should adopt a policy of 120 minutes of PE curriculum time allocation per week with agreement to work towards a minimum of 180 minutes weekly with schools endeavouring to go beyond this minimum where this is possible and a call for at least 60 minutes daily physical activity in or out of school settings” (p. 67).

The University of Worcester Study is concerned about the diminishing amount of time being allocated to PE as there appears to have been a gradual erosion of the amount of time allocated to PE in schools in recent times. Denmark, Sweden, France, Germany and Greece all experienced reductions in PE time allocations. In over 90% of countries PE has the same status as other subjects, but in practice its actual status is perceived to be lower in 34% of countries including Ireland (University of Worcester, 2007, p. 9).

Outside/inside of school hours

In the main, the PE lesson is taught during school hours in Irish primary schools. Many larger schools, of necessity, have rigid timetables for PE and set times for classes using
the general-purpose room or hall. Most small schools do not have the luxury of a general-purpose room or hall and they can generally be more flexible with regard to time and day for the PE lesson. Many schools timetable PE for an afternoon session, sometimes the last hour.

Games, sports and other outdoor activities may take place during school time, after school and even at weekends. Many schools’ finals are played on a Saturday. Sometimes primary school children and teachers take part in sport or games on a Sunday. The INTO/Cumann na mBunscol Mini 7s are a good example of this. Many provinces allow primary school children, both boys and girls, to play exhibition games at half-time during championship football and hurling matches, and these events usually take place on a Sunday. Schools also support the dissemination of information about various sporting events.

Scór na nÓg and community games often have teachers volunteering in their own time to run these events. They often take place on evenings and weekends. It is realised, however, that the physical education of children cannot be left to schools alone. The University of Worcester study makes several references to this point. For example:

“.......Bridges and pathways to community provision need to be constructed, especially to stimulate young people to participate in physical activity during their leisure time” (Introduction, vi).

There are numerous participation pathways or models linking in-school activity with out-of-school activity in EU countries. Examples would be the ‘Sport Service Punt’ in the Netherlands, the Association of School Sport Clubs in the Czech Republic, the ‘Bunkeflo-project’ in Sweden and the ‘PE, School Sport and Club’ link in England (Hardman, 2007).

In Ireland, at present, there are various sporting initiatives but most work independently and within their own particular discipline or sphere. Teachers are often involved as volunteers in various sporting bodies and many do very valuable work in their own time offering their own insight and expertise. Such links are generally unstructured and depend on the individual teachers and the different sporting organisations.

**Who teaches PE?**

All primary teachers have foundation knowledge of PE to enable them to teach the PE curriculum in primary schools and, in general, it is usually the class teacher who teaches PE. However, they are not specialist PE teachers, and some schools have employed specialist PE teachers – usually secondary teachers with a third level PE qualification. In addition, Irish dancing is often taught by an Irish or céilí dancing
teacher and swimming is usually taught by a swimming coach, sometimes with assistance from the teacher in relation to beginners. However, the general understanding of a specialist PE teacher is that they are teachers who are qualified as PE teachers, and not sport coaches employed by sporting organisations. According the recent INTO survey (INTO, 2008), 49% of schools employ specialist teachers for PE during school hours while 20% employ specialist teachers outside school hours. An earlier study by Drewett (2002), carried out in the Kildare area, indicated that the majority of teachers taught PE to their classes but that outside specialists were also employed, mainly for aquatics, gymnastics and gaelic football.

According to the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (1990) specialist dance teachers were employed by 16% of the schools surveyed and 9% employed a specialist PE teacher. The Review Body recommended that some degree of specialisation among teachers should be encouraged so that each school might have at least one teacher with a particular interest and expertise in this area. It also recommended, for safety reasons and because of the nature of the skills that are required in specialised forms of PE, the employment of specially-qualified teachers who could service a number of schools (NCCA & DES, 1990). The Oireachtas Joint Committee Report on the Status of Physical Education (2005) also recommended that specialist teachers be provided at primary level and that “where the specialist teacher is unable to take a class for PE the class teachers should be sufficiently trained to provide physical education”.

However, the INTO opposed the employment of specialist teachers. As stated in Among School Children, the Organisation’s response to the Green Paper: Education for a Changing World, “the best teacher of PE is the generalist, the qualified primary teacher who has a particular expertise in PE” (INTO, 1993). The INTO recommended the secondment of experienced teachers to facilitate inservice education at school-based level. The Primary School Sports Initiative also argued that inservice programmes should allay teachers’ fears about teaching PE and “persuade” teachers that large parts of the curriculum are ‘doable’ and do not require specialist knowledge. This focus on the need for proper inservice was reiterated in the Oireachtas Joint Committee Report on the Status of Physical Education (2005) which also recommended that a review be carried out on the training of teachers at primary level to ensure they have the confidence and competence to teach the subject.

The view that classroom teachers are best placed to teach the PE curriculum is generally echoed by the colleges of education who maintain that it can send the wrong message to children if a class teacher is unable to take a PE class and has to employ a specialist teacher. In addition, the separation of PE from the rest of the curriculum by the introduc-

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1 The PSSI was established in 2000 “To advise the Minister for Education and Science on the promotion in primary schools of sport, physical education and healthy lifestyles, to oversee the work of the national co-ordinators appointed by the Minister for this purpose and to propose ways in which participation can be greatly increased and to set targets to achieve these aims”.

— 17 —
tion of specialist teachers is not in keeping with an integrated curriculum. However, one college did suggest that there was a place for specialist teachers in PE, if they taught a portion of the programme, liaising closely with the class teacher. It was also pointed out that it was difficult to find a specialist teacher who was familiar with the PE primary curriculum. Class teachers are responsible for the overall PE plan and need to ensure that all strands of the curriculum are covered in accordance with the school PE plan.

Games coaches have become increasingly familiar figures in recent years coaching GAA, rugby and soccer skills and in some instances basketball, tennis, or badminton skills. The success of the GAA coaching scheme is reflected in a recent INTO survey in that 71% of respondents avail of the service (INTO, 2008). Fewer respondents (21%) reported that they use the rugby coaching scheme, while 29% have access to other coaching schemes, the most popular being basketball, soccer, cycling, ‘Fit for Fun’, tennis and swimming.

PE cuiditheoirí, under the auspices of the RCSS2, have become a feature of school life and many will teach sample lessons when requested. Some schools use their school tour day to visit adventure centres where activities like canoeing, rock climbing, archery and orienteering are sampled. These activities are usually taught by qualified instructors. In recent years several ice rinks open in December and January and older pupils have been taken by schools to experience ice skating.

**Costs**

The GAA coaches are usually Games Promotion Officers and are paid by the GAA. In the past, counties attempting to provide coaches for schools often asked for a coaching levy from the local clubs and in some instances schools. Rugby and FAI coaches are also usually paid by their associations but sometimes schools make local agreements with coaches. Swimming teachers are usually hired by the pool authorities and the school normally reaches an agreement with the pool in relation to hire of the pool and coaching. This cost is borne by the school. The school also pays for transport to the pool.

Dancing, gymnastic and other specialist teachers are usually paid for out of school funds. Sometimes parents are asked to pay a suggested contribution to sporting and cultural events either at the beginning of the year or on a termly basis. Other schools sell tickets and run fundraising functions to cover the costs associated with providing aspects of the PE programme. According to the INTO survey (INTO, 2008), about one seventh of schools ask parents to contribute towards the cost of curriculum activities, the majority of these for swimming/aquatics (57%). Some respondents reported that pupils paid to participate in athletics, dance, games, gymnastics and outdoor and adventure activities. It is a matter of concern that parents are being charged for what should be a basic right for their children.
School policies

School policies appear to vary widely even within the same town or parish. Concern has been expressed about the small number of pupils who opt out of elements of the PE curriculum. Pupils and their parents appear to view PE as an optional subject rather than a core curricular subject. Similarly some teachers may absend themselves from a formal role in PE instruction if schools are utilising outside agencies and personnel. There are also concerns that a percentage of teachers – however small – use excuses not to fully engage with the PE curriculum – wet weather, misbehaviour, lack of time and a lack of resources.

Health and growing problem of obesity

According to the Health Service Executive, one in four children and one in two adults living in Ireland are overweight or obese. Obesity in childhood is becoming more common and obese children tend to become obese adults. Children who watch TV for hours or play with computers and video games for vast amounts of time are at higher risk of obesity than those who are playing sports. Risk factors include low birth weight, parental obesity, excessive TV viewing, fast foods and fizzy drinks. Protective factors include breast-feeding, regular mealtimes, shared family meals, healthy diet, active lifestyles and sports participation. However, in a study of adults undertaken in Louisiana State University (US), led by Dr Claude Bouchard, physiologist, it was found that genes could have a strong impact on how receptive people were to exercise. Dr Bouchard claims that people are either “high-responders” or “low-responders” or “non-responders” to exercise, as people who exercise the same amount do not all get the same benefits. Research by Terence Wilkin, Plymouth, (UK), has also found that children's activity levels are governed by an internal biological mechanism that may be pre-set before birth, which he called an “activitystar”, therefore, the amount of energy children expend may be determined by their genes. The activitystar hypothesis emerged after trials suggested that no matter how much or how little exercise children were offered, they found their own level. Professor Wilkin claims that children who exercised more seemed generally healthier and research from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (Alspac), using data from the ‘Children of the 90s’ project, suggested that an extra 15 minutes a day of moderate or vigorous physical activity halved the risk of obesity in 12-year-old children.

In order to prevent obesity it is recommended that children should be physically
active for at least 60 minutes every day, and in order to increase physical activity among
the population, including children, the Health Service Executive (HSE) recommends
that every day activities should include playing outside, helping with household
chores, walking and taking the stairs instead of the lift. The HSE also recommends the
playing of sports, swimming, cycling, skateboarding and rollerblading as recreational
activities. In order to maintain and improve strength and stamina, skipping, dancing,
rope-climbing, push-ups and pull-ups are recommended. Practising yoga, martial arts
and stretching exercises are recommended for helping improve and maintain flexibil-
ity. In addition, healthy eating, by eating a wide variety of foods from the Food
Pyramid is encouraged. Nutrition and healthy eating are included as part of Social,
Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in schools.

The Report of the National Taskforce on Obesity (2005) stated that a balance of food
intake and physical activity is necessary for a healthy weight. The Report indicated that
children should be involved in at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity per day
in order to prevent excess weight gain. Among the Report’s recommendations of
particular relevance to primary schools were the following:

- All schools should be encouraged to develop consistent school policies to
  promote healthy eating and active living.
- The emphasis in all schools should be on increased physical activity including
  participation in sports.
- Every child should be enabled to achieve a minimum of 30 minutes physical
  activity per day.
- All schools should meet the minimum requirement of two hours of physical
  education per week delivered by appropriately-qualified staff.
- The Department of Education and Science should prioritise the provision and
  maintenance of physical education and physical activity facilities to address the
  issue of equality and access to all schools.
- Resources should be provided by the Department of Education and Science for
  adequate teacher training to support active living and healthy eating.
- The National Parents’ organisations should work with parents and support them
  in encouraging healthy eating and active living.
- Every child should receive a safe and active passage to school through the provi-
  sion of safe walkways, cycleways or transport.

The INTO in response, demanded that all schools be provided with proper facilities
in order to enable teachers to implement the full PE curriculum. The union also
reiterated the view that schools alone cannot solve the problem of obesity.

The ESRI (2006) also examined the link between participation in sports and obesity

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5 National Guidelines for Community Based Practitioners on Prevention and Management of Childhood
Overweight and Obesity.
and weight. In their primary sample of 5th and 6th class children, 3.8% of boys and 4.3% of girls were obese and a further 15.7% of boys and 15.8% of girls were overweight. However, there was no strong pattern of association between participation in sport and obesity and weight. It is thought that the lack of relationship between physical activity and risk of obesity may arise because measures of physical activity may not capture real variations in energy expenditure or because variations in energy expenditure are too small to counteract the effects on weight of other factors such as diet. However, there is some indication that high levels of exercise, well in excess of minimum recommended levels may have an effect on body mass.

A starting point to combat what the World Health Organization has termed a ‘global epidemic’ of obesity must be serious investment in physical education at all levels. In the long-term, investment in physical education in Ireland makes sound financial sense in the light of the looming healthcare bill from an increasingly unhealthy and inactive population (Joint Oireachtas Report on the Status of Physical Education, 2005).

The role of the community

There are three main areas around which structured physical activity for children and young people can take place – the PE curriculum in schools, usually once a week, extra-curricular sports played in schools and sports played outside school (Fahey et al, 2005). The Office of the Minister for Children endorses this view in its report State of the Nation’s Children, published in 2006, and states that government policy supports the development of physical activity for children in these three main areas. Schools carry a large part of the responsibility for children’s physical education activities. Teachers accept their responsibility to develop the whole child physically and mentally but other pathways need to be developed and other agencies need to become involved to ensure that each child reaches his/her physical potential. Opportunities for children to participate in sports and physical activity at community level, therefore, need to be further developed, in order to complement the work being done in schools.

Special needs

As outlined in the Report of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Science on the status of Physical Education (2005), according to the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) – Sport, the opportunities for participation in physical education or school sport by the pupil with a disability are poor to non-existent. The barriers include a lack of facilities, reluctance by PE teachers to accept responsibility for a pupil with a disability, transport difficulties and most of all attitudes. The report also stated that research indicated that only 9% of teaching and professional development staff surveyed felt they had sufficient training at undergraduate level to work with pupils with special needs (p. 38).
Therefore, greater training and professional development for teachers needs to be in place to cater for students with special needs. In their submission to the Oireachtas Joint Committee, the IWA – Sport also recommended that additional resources be allocated to schools with a high incidence of special needs students, and they called for the development of a resource package for schools to address issues such as inclusion, facilities, terminology and adaptation techniques. The colleges of education address special needs in PE in the context of inclusion.

**TEACHER EDUCATION**

**Initial Teacher Education**

Physical education is part of the curriculum on all undergraduate and postgraduate courses for student teachers in Ireland. Time allocation for PE varies between the colleges (21 to 50 hours) with students on the post-graduate courses generally being provided fewer hours. The smaller colleges employ a PE lecturer on a part-time basis only. Some colleges offer elective and/or extra curricular courses in PE in addition to the core course, which enables students to gain additional experience and enhance their expertise in aspects of the PE programme. On entering college not many students have had extensive experience of PE, particularly in gymnastics and GAA games. Some of the colleges provide opportunities for students at the beginning of their first year to experience the various aspects of PE in which they are lacking. All colleges address the six strands of the PE curriculum in the course of the three years, with an emphasis on continuity and progression.

Forms of evaluation vary from college to college and from year to year within colleges. These include practical and written assignments, diary/journal keeping, attendance, schemes and lesson plans for teaching practice, presentations and written examinations. One college devotes one full lecture to differentiation and inclusion while all colleges deal with these issues as they arise in all lectures, especially coming up to teaching practice, where students would have to deal with specific incidences in their classes. Assessment in PE is addressed in colleges though perhaps not sufficiently where students are encouraged to adopt teacher observation as their main tool of assessment in PE. One of the colleges also encourages the students to assess whether they themselves have achieved their objectives (self-assessment). Assessment in PE is addressed in theory sessions in another college.

All the colleges are well resourced but the facilities available in the different colleges vary and are not fully satisfactory. All have or have access to gyms and sports halls, none has a swimming pool, and not all have appropriate outdoor facilities such as playing
pitches and hard-surfaced areas. Aquatics are dealt with through presentations and discussions concerning issues such as organising trips to pools, water safety, insurance, ethics and hygiene matters. Generic skills for games are taught and some colleges offer additional coaching in certain games such as football, hurling, rugby, volleyball, soccer, basketball, often in collaboration with national sport organisations.

The colleges highlight the fact that the PE curriculum is not a sport curriculum. Sport within the context of the PE curriculum is completely different from what children do in clubs outside school. PE lessons should be inclusive of all children. In station teaching, where children are grouped on ability, each child can be competitive within his or her own group and be challenged at a level that suits him/herself. In order to support pupils who are particularly talented in an area of PE, some colleges advise students to refer such pupils to facilities and clubs available locally.

There is an emphasis on ensuring that PE is fun and inclusive. There is room for children to be competitive as a certain amount of competition can be healthy and fun for children. Competitiveness can be directed towards team effort. The more inclusive the competition the better. There are many aspects of the PE programme that are non-competitive such as outdoor and adventure, dance and gymnastics. Students prepare plans and lessons to teach PE during teaching practice and are encouraged to adapt their PE lessons according to the facilities available in the schools to which they are assigned for teaching practice.

The PE staff members in all the colleges of education have recently formed a discussion group to share ideas and to address PE issues common to teacher-education courses. This group (CEPEC: Colleges of Education PE Consortium) meets regularly and has made significant progress to date.

Additional information on PE in pre-service teacher education is included in Appendix 3.

**Continuing Professional Development**

The *Revised Primary School Curriculum* was introduced to schools in 1999. A professional development programme – the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) – was put in place to support its implementation. According to the PCSP its purpose is “to mediate the Primary School Curriculum for teachers towards enabling them to implement it in their schools”⁶. In general, in-career development seminars were organised for all teachers and schools staffs were provided with an opportunity to plan as a whole staff in relation to the implementation of the curriculum. Two professional development seminar days, involving 2,000 seminars over a two-year period, were devoted to physical education supporting the development of new
knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes to the subject and schools availed themselves of one planning day for PE.

To support planning for PE in schools on a continuous basis, the PCSP in collaboration with School Development Planning (SDP), have drawn up planning prompts and templates in consultation with the Department of Education and Science and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

As part of the PCSP service the Regional Curriculum Support Service (RCSS) have appointed cuiditheoirí to support all subjects, including PE. There are a total of 14 cuiditheoirí supporting PE at present. Cuiditheoirí are available to support schools in planning for the implementation of the PE programme and in developing content and methodologies. They are available to visit schools to work with whole staffs, to work with individual teachers or groups of teachers or they can model lessons and approaches. The PE team is currently advocating a seasonal planned approach to PE. The RCSS also offers sustained support where cuiditheoirí can work with a particular school over a period of time. The cuiditheoireacht service is accessed through the Education Centres.

Certificate, diploma and masters programmes in physical education are also available in some colleges. Some PE cuiditheoirí have completed certificate and diploma programmes and have progressed on the masters programmes.

RESOURCES AND FACILITIES

Throughout the years the provision of PE has been inadequate in many primary schools due to unsuitable facilities and a lack of equipment and resources. In the Joint Oireachtas Report on the Status of PE (2005), it was noted that there was never a period of significant funding in the area of PE, nor had it ever been seen as worthy of serious investment or concentration either in terms of resources or planning. It went on to single out the primary sector as having been particularly neglected, with many schools not having a gym or even a general-purpose room that could be used in place of a gym. The ESRI also commented that primary schools were worse off than second-level schools regarding the availability of sports facilities (ESRI, 2006). Indeed, in many primary schools, the provision of PE is totally dependent on the weather.

According to the 1976 INTO survey only 65% of teachers claimed to be teaching PE and of these only 34% were satisfied with the way they were teaching it. In 1988, an INTO report stated almost half of the one-to-three-teacher schools did not teach PE on a weekly basis because of a lack of suitable indoor facilities and equipment. Surveys vary in their portrayal of the situation in schools regarding facilities, resources and equipment, depending on the nature of the questions asked and the context in which
the survey took place. However, in general the situation remains far from satisfactory.

**School facilities**

Early surveys showed that over two thirds of national schools did not have suitable indoor facilities for PE and that over one third did not have suitable outdoor facilities (Department of Education, 1977; Cotter, 1977). In 1996, an INTO survey (INTO, 1996) showed that 40% of schools did not have a PE hall and that 28% did not have a suitably-surfaced yard. Less than half of the schools in the Kildare area in 2001, had an indoor PE hall, and many of those that did, considered it unsuitable (Drewett, 2002). A snapshot survey carried out by the INTO in 2004, indicated that 80% of schools in Donegal did not have a PE hall, 63% of schools in Clare did not have a PE hall, 70% of schools in Kerry did not have a PE hall and 14% of schools in Dublin did not have a PE hall. However, 60% of the 86% of schools in Dublin that had a PE hall reported that these were inadequate or unsatisfactory.

According to a recent INTO survey carried out in 2005, the situation in schools in relation to PE facilities was still unsatisfactory. While the vast majority (88%) of respondents indicated that their school had a suitably-surfaced school yard which could be used for PE, only 39% indicated that their schools had a general-purpose (GP) room, though a small majority of respondents (68%) indicated that they had access to a hall for PE. However, as indicated in previous surveys, such facilities are not always adequate. Therefore, it’s quite clear that a very high percentage of primary schools either don’t have PE halls or are relying on inadequate and unsatisfactory halls. A significant minority (23%) did not have access to a playing field. Other PE facilities in schools included astro turf, a shared assembly place, all weather pitch and access to a local sports centre.

According to a survey, carried out by the then Fine Gael spokesperson on Arts, Sports, and Tourism in 2005, 23% of principals reported that their schools had no facilities, 51% had a multipurpose (GP) room and 25% had a sports hall, though only 10% of these sport halls were greater than 170sq. metres. It is widely accepted that most multipurpose rooms are too small for PE. While 46% did report having a playing field a number of respondents indicated that this facility was either less than full-size or simply an underdeveloped open area. Almost 30% did not have a suitable outdoor hard surface. A small survey carried out by the INTO in Munster in 2005, indicated that only 51% of schools had PE facilities, though these were not adequate in 9% of cases.

In relation to teaching aquatics, according to the 2005 INTO survey a small majority (53%) of respondents have the use of a pool within five miles of the school, and only 1% travel more than 26 miles. According to Fine Gael’s survey (2005), only 0.3% of schools have a swimming pool and 29% have access to a swimming pool.

The Preliminary Report on a pilot study conducted by FAI, GAA, and NCTC (2001)
on the position of school sport in a sample of Irish primary and post primary schools reported that 54.3% of pupils at primary level participate in internal school sport. The main reason given for lack of participation was lack of facilities.

**Adequacy of equipment and resources**

Both Cotter and the Department of Education (1977) found that less than 20% of schools had adequate large or small apparatus or equipment. The situation does not appear to have improved much since then. According to Drewett, less than half of the schools in the Kildare area had the recommended equipment for implementing the revised PE curriculum (2002). In the INTO 2005 Survey (INTO, 2008), respondents were asked to rate the adequacy of the equipment and resources in their schools for the teaching of the PE strands. The responses clearly show that many schools do not have the resources or equipment to teach the PE strands. Equipment and resources for games were the most adequate but almost half (49%) of the respondents described the equipment and resources available for gymnastics as poor. See Table below.

**Table 2: Adequacy of equipment and resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How adequate are the equipment and resources in your school to teach the following PE strands?</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor and Adventure</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnastics</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A majority of respondents (58%) did not have access to wood, park or forest for outdoor and adventure activities.

The ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute) recommends a more integrated approach to children’s sport, to include PE, extra-curricular activities and participation outside of school and calls for an improvement in sports facilities in primary schools (ESRI 2005).

Additional information on resources and facilities is contained in Appendix 4.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The importance of physical activity for children has been highlighted by many bodies, such as the National Heart Alliance, the Working Group on Lifelong Involvement in
Sport and Physical Activity, the Health Service Executive, and the ESRI among others. The centrality of PE in a child’s development needs to be acknowledged and acted upon and if implementation of the PE curriculum in primary schools is to be taken seriously, there is need for substantial investment in facilities, equipment and teacher education. The curriculum is based on the assumption that schools have the appropriate facilities and equipment and that teachers are skilled and competent to teach the PE curriculum. Research and surveys, to date, as outlined in this report, indicate that this is not the situation. According to teachers, PE is an important aspect of the curriculum (Drewett, 2002), but how it is resourced does not reflect its position as an integral part of the primary curriculum. In order to address the current shortcomings, and to encourage schools to be “active schools”, the INTO makes the following recommendations.

Policy

It is disappointing that PE does not appear to have the status of other curriculum subjects when it comes to resourcing its implementation in schools.

**The INTO recommends:**

- that the status and profile of PE in schools should be heightened;
- that the DES should show a commitment to developing PE as a core subject in primary schools;
- that safety and litigation issues that give rise to fear among teachers in relation to teaching PE be addressed;
- that parents be invited to support teachers in promoting PE.

Facilities

It is unacceptable that primary schools have been built in the last few decades without basic PE facilities such as indoor general purpose rooms or PE halls. It is equally unacceptable that schools do not have access to suitable outdoor facilities such as appropriate hard surfaces and playing fields.

**Therefore, the INTO recommends:**

- that all schools have a general purpose room or PE hall where PE can be taught;
- that a major investment in facilities be undertaken to ensure that all primary schools have adequate up-to-date modern facilities for PE;
- that an audit of existing swimming pool facilities be carried out, and where schools do not have access to public swimming pools, that a programme of investment in public swimming pools be established, suitable for the use of schools and available to the general public;
• that all schools have access to a suitable outdoor hard surface for outdoor PE activities.

Resources and equipment

Schools vary significantly in the amount of equipment and resources they have for the teaching of PE, which may determine the quality of PE provision in the school. All pupils, regardless of school attended, should have access to a quality PE curriculum.

Therefore, the INTO recommends:

• that an audit of school resources be carried out;
• that any shortfalls in equipment and resources be immediately rectified;
• that adequate storage facilities for equipment be provided;
• that additional resources for special needs pupils be provided;
• that an annual grant be available to schools for the purchase and updating of PE equipment and resources.

Curriculum

The PE curriculum is a broadly balanced but ambitious curriculum, which all pupils are entitled to access. Pupils should not be exempt from any aspect of the PE curriculum except for medical reasons. No pupils should have to pay to partake in any aspect of the PE programme offered by the school within school hours.

The INTO recommends:

• that all pupils take part in PE lessons;
• that all schools provide one hour a week of PE in both infant and senior classes;
• that the emphasis be placed firmly on extending and improving skills rather than on games and competition;
• that class sizes be reduced to facilitate the teaching of PE;
• that all strands of the PE curriculum be available to all pupils at some stage during their primary school years;
• that all schools have access to swimming pools;
• that no charge be levied on pupils for aspects of the curriculum.

Assessment

It is evident from studies to date that assessment in PE has not been given much emphasis. However, this lack of assessment in PE must be seen in the context that
guidelines on assessment have yet to issue to schools.

### The INTO recommends:

- that all teachers be given further inservice in assessment of PE;
- that the assessment guidelines for school include guidance on the assessment of PE;
- that the Inspectorate assess the current situation regarding the teaching of PE and make recommendations to teachers.

### Teacher education and professional development

Teachers are of the view that they are poorly prepared for the teaching of PE and that they lack confidence. According to Drewett (2002) teachers admit they teach a limited programme, based on the available facilities and resources, but importantly, also based on their confidence to teach the PE curriculum. They are generally satisfied with the way they teach what they teach in PE. Nevertheless, there are challenges for the Colleges of Education to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach PE and that continuing professional development in PE is also available to practising teachers. Initiatives taken by the colleges to date are welcome.

### The INTO recommends:

- that a review of the PE modules in the colleges of education be initiated to ensure they meet the needs of the student teachers;
- that the PE module in the colleges of education be extended;
- that a survey of student teachers be carried out to ascertain their needs in relation to developing the necessary competence and confidence to teach;
- that all teachers periodically receive inservice in PE;
- that additional courses be made available through the education centres;
- that additional training be available for all teachers with special needs pupils;
- that certificate, diploma and masters degree courses be available to teachers who wish to pursue such studies in the area of PE.

### Co-operation with other organisations

Children’s physical well being depends on more than the PE curriculum in schools. Many schools avail of support provided by local sporting organisations in order to enhance pupils’ opportunities for physical activity.

### Therefore, the INTO recommends:

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7 Assessment guidelines were issued to all primary schools in January 2008.
• that a large-scale survey be carried out in order to ascertain the extent of external influences e.g., swimming, GAA, soccer, tag-rugby, and Irish dancing coaches on the PE curriculum in schools;
• that the policy of using ‘specialist outsiders’ be reviewed and recommendations be given to all schools;
• that all outsider personnel working with children in schools be subject to vetting procedures;
• that studies be carried out to see to what extent there can be greater co-operation between schools and local sporting organisations in the sharing of facilities and resources.

Specialist PE teaching

Though the INTO has traditionally supported the policy that the classroom teacher is best placed to teach the PE curriculum, perhaps it is timely to carry out a review to see if specialisation, in any form, could enhance and improve the teaching of PE in Irish primary schools. However, any form of specialisation must ensure that those who teach PE in primary schools are qualified to teach at primary level and are familiar with the primary school curriculum.

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evaluation of programme implementation’, Oideas. 44:46-64


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Worcester University Study (see Hardman above)
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Appendix 1

A Select History and Philosophy of
PE

Physical education is in a sense as old as human society (Willets, 1986). Our earliest ancestors needed to be able to hunt, run and be physically strong to survive. It was the survival of the fittest for the hunter-gatherers. It is probably true to say that in the modern world the fittest still survive longest but we don't have to hunt for food nor for that matter do we have to farm. The hunter-gatherers had to hunt for their food which involved many physical skills, gathering too required physical skills and the individuals or groups that were most successful survived. Early farmers needed different physical skills than the hunter-gatherers but strength and stamina were still necessary. We can be fairly certain that our early ancestors fought to defend themselves and their territories and fighting skills had to be learned, practised and perfected or else the survival of groups and tribes would be in jeopardy.

Our earliest ancestors saw physical education as a prerequisite for survival. To increase the chances of group survival, the tribe encouraged youths to develop the strength, endurance, agility, and skills needed to withstand the danger of outdoor life, to obtain the necessities of life. PE was promoted by parents and tribal leaders. Games were often used. Games of war, chase and tag were common. Dancing and other rhythmic activities were used. PE was learned by children by imitation, indoctrination and trial-and-error methods.

The history of physical education reflects people's attitudes to physical activity. From prehistoric times, because survival was related to physical stamina and to people's ability to find food, no separate physical fitness programmes were needed. Gradually ancient societies in China, Egypt, Greece and Rome adopted physical

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education as part of military training. The history of physical education frequently shows a pattern of military, social, and political influence.

The Egyptians, Chinese, Greeks, Spartans and Romans all developed physical education systems. In Egypt BC, swimming was popular even among women. Dance, archery, lion hunting, fishing, stick fighting, acrobatics and ball games were all practised. In China BC, swimming, archery, hunting, fishing, wrestling, boxing, football, polo, flying kites and martial arts were practised. The growth of the Greek city-states brought changes in Greek society. The Greeks are credited with giving us the word gymnasium. The gymnasium was an indispensable feature of the social life of the city-state. Larger cities often had two, or more, gymasia, besides additional training-schools (palaistrai) (Willets, 1986). The Greek training in physical education was primarily to develop soldiers who would be ready for war. Plato in his Republic argued that war was inevitable and that education should consist of “music” and “gymnastic” (Willets, 1986). The Greeks participated in boxing, wrestling, racing, dancing, swimming, rowing, chariot racing and javelin and discus throwing. The Greek pentathlon consisted of wrestling, boxing, running, jumping and throwing.

Each exercise was designed for a specific purpose. Thus, the different kinds of wrestling were considered to strengthen loins, arms and legs: running improved lightness and speed, as well as providing a salutary exercise for the lungs; jumping made the lower leg vigorous and supple; throwing strengthened the muscles of arms and wrists (Willets, 1986). The Spartans took physical education to another level. Physical fitness, military skills and respect for authority shaped the course of Spartan education. Education was regulated by the state and was predominantly physical education. Spartan boys particularly were trained from seven onwards and for most of their adult lives were subject to state discipline and expected to fight in the Spartan armies. Girls were also encouraged to live an outdoor life and to train physically so that they might have strong children. Boys were tested periodically to evaluate their physical skills. Praise and punishment were used. Flogging was one of the penalties.

The Roman schools didn't promote physical education. Attempts were made to introduce Greek style athletic festivals to Rome. Emperor Domitian made the most successful attempt. There were contests in running, boxing, discus and javelin throwing (McIntosh, 1986). The Roman baths, however, provided for a wide range of physical activities. The baths became centres for physical recreation and exercise. Running, jumping, wrestling, ball games and exercises with weights were all practised in the baths. Romans seem to have been concerned to some extent with the problem of keeping fit. Seneca, who despised the cult of the body on the ground that however strong one’s sinews were one could never be a match for a first class bull, found it necessary to recommend for general well being some short and simple exercises which tire the body rapidly and so save time. Running, exercises with weights, high-jumping, and jumps known as ‘The Priests Dance’ were the activities which he recommended (McIntosh, 1986).
The Romans excelled at military training. During the reign of Trajan about 12,000 soldiers were stationed in Rome. They had a specialised form of physical training and it is thought that this was uniform throughout the Imperial armies (McIntosh, 1986). They practised marching at the rate of 20 miles in five hours. The soldiers were trained in running, jumping, swimming and weapons training. In weapon training the sword, shield and spear they practised with were twice the weight of what they would use in battle and they practised with these weapons twice daily.

The soldiers practised mounting and dismounting until they could do it without thinking. To make continuous practice possible a wooden horse was used. On this ancestor of the modern vaulting horse the Roman recruit first practised mounting unarmed, then armed, then from left or right side, then leaping on and off and finally he was required to mount and dismount armed with an unsheathed sword or pike (McIntosh, 1986).

Claudius Galen was a doctor and prolific writer born in AD 130 and died AD 201. About 100 of his works survive, many written on medical themes. He also wrote about sports and medical gymnastics and many of his theories bear repeating. Many of his writings anticipate modern theories of physical education. He suggests, in a rudimentary form, the type of physical education that is suitable for children in different age groups, from birth to seven, from seven to 14 and from 14 to 21 (Koch, 1923). He issued a warning on the danger of strains and ruptures if vigorous exercise is taken without preliminary warming up. He is a firm believer in massage both before and after vigorous exercise (Koch, 1923). He classified exercises and activities into three groups according to their effect on the body.

The first group he calls vigorous exercises and they would closely correspond to modern strengthening exercises. The second group consisted of exercises Galen thought trained quickness of speed like running and sparring. The third group Galen called violent exercises which would appear to train stamina and endurance. Galen also drew a distinction between normal fitness or well being and athletic fitness. He emphasised several times that athletic fitness was dangerous and socially useless. Galen stated that athletic fitness was dangerous to health and the athlete’s training actually prevented him from performing socially-useful tasks such as rowing, digging, ploughing or road making, whether in war or in peace. Physical exercise and gymnastics were necessary to maintain normal health and well-being. Galen was one of the first to say, or even to think it necessary to say, that gymnastics must be enjoyable. Neither Aristotle nor Plato who wrote so fervently in favour of physical education felt it necessary to stress the need to make physical education attractive.

Galen was one of the first modern writers on physical education. When he died in AD 201 there was a gap of some twelve hundred years when little progress was made; but when the renaissance of learning and sciences took place, Galen's work provided the model and the basis for the further development of therapeutic gymnastics and systematic exercise (McIntosh, 1986).
RENAISSANCE ITALY AND TUDOR ENGLAND

In Italy, about the year 1404, Vergerius, the true founder of the new education according to Woodward (1906), apparently recognised little other purpose for physical education than to serve military needs. Vergerius took Sparta as his model. It was for military efficiency that Vergerius had boys learn the Greek pentathlon, swimming, horsemanship, use of the shield, spear, sword and club. Aeneas Sylvius too, maintained that children should be taught to use the bow, sling and spear and also to ride, to leap and to swim, because it would be their destiny to defend Christendom against the Turks (Woodward, 1906). It was soon realised, however, that physical education could also make a positive contribution to the development of the whole man.

Much of the credit for developing these ideas in theory and practice must go to two practising schoolmasters, Guarino da Verona and Vittorino da Feltre – friends and contemporaries. Da Feltre believed that the highest level of humanist culture could only be attained if the full personality were developed along the three channels – mental, physical and spiritual (McIntosh, 1986). Other writers like Castiglione, Cardinal Sadoleto and Matteo Palmieri all advocated physical education and the education of the whole man. Castiglione's book Il Cortegiano and other educational works of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries show that the physical education of the privileged and ruling class was both accepted and systematised and that much of its inspiration, if little of its programme of activities, was derived from the ancient city-states of classical Greece (McIntosh, 1986).

The revival of learning led to a renewed interest in the original Greek and Roman sources of medical theory and practice, particularly the works of Claudius Galen. Among these, few received greater attention than the six books De Sanitate Tuenda in which Galen had discussed the contribution of exercise to health and had classified particular activities and exercises by their effects upon the body (McIntosh, 1986). Italy, then, was the origin and fount of ideas and practices in physical education during the Renaissance (McIntosh, 1986).

England was slow to embrace the new learning. It made little impression on English life until the end of the sixteenth century when Italian concepts of physical education began to filter into England. Books on health, written and published in England, emphasised the necessity of exercise if health was to be maintained (Boorde, 1542, Salusbury, 1603). In the new schools, with one or two exceptions, there was little physical education and no systematic physical education as was advocated in Italy by Palmieri and put into practice by Vittorino. Physical education was not encouraged in the older universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Football was forbidden in Cambridge in 1574, while at Oxford in 1584 any “minister or deacon” convicted of this offence was to be banished and reported to his Bishop; scholars over eighteen were to be imprisoned and fined, and those under eighteen were to be flogged in St Mary's (Mulcaster, 1581).
The curriculum in universities and schools appears to have been strongly influenced by an ascetic view of life, and the education of scholars included little, if any, physical education, except at Merchant Taylors. The headmaster of that school from 1560-1586, Richard Mulcaster, was perhaps the most enlightened schoolmaster of his day. The tragedy is that his two books on education, *Positions* (1581) and *Elementarie* (1582) soon went out of print and remained out of print for 300 years. *Positions* was first reprinted in 1888 and *Elementarie* did not reappear until 1925. Mulcaster eagerly subscribed to the view that the mind and the body, being partners, must not be severed in training (McIntosh, 1986). Mulcaster classified physical exercises and gave examples of the effects of specific exercises. He stated that exercise should begin with gentle preparative exercise, go on to gymnastics and with postparative exercise – to reduce the body by gentle degrees to the same quietness in constitution wherein it was before it was so moved.

The same doctrine, put forward by Swedish medical gymnasts some 400 years later, came to be known in the world of physical education as ‘The Swedish Curve’. Mulcaster was also insistent that the same person should be concerned with physical and academic education. In this idea, as in so much else, Mulcaster was ahead of his age. His views were not accepted by schools and colleges (McIntosh, 1986).

**GYMNASTICS IN DENMARK AND SWEDEN**

Climate has favoured the growth of football and organised games at English public schools, and climate has favoured the development of a gymnastic form of physical education in Denmark and Sweden. The years 1784-1814 saw important work done by the Danish Great School Commission. A plan for a national system of rural schools (folkeskoler) was prepared by 1799 and elementary education was finally made compulsory both in the capital and in the provinces by a royal decree of July 29th 1814. In the school code of that year gymnastics were made a compulsory subject in elementary schools.

In Sweden, physical education after 1814 was dominated by one man, Pehr Henrik Ling. About 1815, Ling began to develop medical gymnastics for the relief and cure of physical disabilities. His ‘medical gymnastics’ were not accepted without fierce opposition from the more conservative physicians, and he complained bitterly towards the end of his life at lack of recognition. Ling’s concern that science should be applied to physical education was one of the most important and lasting features of his work (McIntosh, 1986). He insisted that medicine and physical education must be allies and that teachers of physical education must have theoretical knowledge as well as practical ability. According to Ling, gymnastics should always include theory and practice, as
the gymnast who lacks the one or the other must always labour at a disadvantage for
he does not know when or how he should use a particular movement (McIntosh,
1986).

It was Ling's son, however, who was responsible for developing school gymnastics.
Hjalmar Ling (1820-1886) arranged and systematised his father's work, so that every
part of the body from head to foot might be exercised in a single lesson. Hjalmar also
invented apparatus for children so that large numbers might use it in a single lesson.
Pehr Henrik Ling's greatest contribution to physical education was in the sphere of
therapeutic exercise but his own conception of physical education was not limited to
such exercise. Gymnastics for Ling embraced games and sports, many of which he
himself pursued, as well as the artificial movements he devised (McIntosh, 1986).

After his death in 1839, however, it was a restricted view of gymnastics that
prevailed. There were a number of factors for this. The hard winters and the short
days favoured physical education that could best be done indoors. There was a rapid
growth in population at the time and gymnastics and free-standing exercises provided
an easy solution to the problem of educating the ever-increasing number of children.
Towns were small and crowded, hours of work long and these factors also militated
against the evolution of organised sport.

In Denmark and Sweden, there were differences of approaches to gymnastics but
after 150 years of development, gymnastics continued to be the basis of physical
education. It started as a form of military training and therapy, grew to be the means
of systematic development and then became a robust and vigorous activity in its own
right. The close connection between gymnastics and health was one of the main ideals
of early pioneers and was a striking feature of subsequent developments (McIntosh,
1986).

PHYSICAL EDUCATION SINCE WWII

All Europeans, to some extent, were affected by the Second World War. Many coun-
tries lost a large percentage of the next generation of young men. There were also
civilian casualties. Education, including physical education, was affected by the war.
People began to think again about physical education as a necessity for war. In some
countries throwing hand grenades and other supposedly relevant skills were taught in
the curriculum but physical training in almost any form received a boost and “fitness
for service” (military) became a slogan for all (McIntosh, 1981). Conquering or occu-
pying armies also brought with them games like baseball, basketball and volleyball
and basketball backboards became a regular feature in school gymnasia.

By 1967, more than 70 countries had made PE a required subject for boys and girls
at one or more levels of formal education but poor facilities were still a major constraint especially among the emergent nations (McIntosh, 1981). For example, Ghana reported to UNESCO in 1976 that “the sum total of equipment at the average primary school is a football or two and that only one secondary school and one University faculty have swimming pools” (UNESCO, 1976).

New terminology like ‘movement education’ began to be introduced. Movement was divided into free movement or locomotion like walking, running and jumping and movements with objects. Movement and dance were introduced from the 1940s onwards with other terms like free dancing and modern dance also being used to describe movement and dance. From the 1950s onwards movement education was differentiated into modern educational gymnastics and modern educational dance with the techniques of games, sports and swimming forming a third category (McIntosh, 1981). America imported movement education from several European sources in the 1950s and 1960s and mixed it with indigenous work in dance and natural movement which had been going on before and during the War (McIntosh, 1981). Confusion reigned on the exact meaning of movement, with more than 50 interpretations of the physiological, motor, psychological, mental, emotional and behavioural outcomes attributed to participation in exercise, big muscle activities, sport, athletics, dance, body mechanics and other related movement experiences (Metheney, 1977).

The US was concerned with the lack of physical fitness in the 1950s. JF Kennedy, before he took office, wrote an article for Sports Illustrated entitled ‘The Soft American’ in which he made a call for every American to assume responsibility for his own fitness and the fitness of his children (Kennedy, 1960).

Canada enacted its Fitness and Amateur Sport Act in 1961, and in Europe, the TRIM campaign in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, West Germany and the Netherlands had as its aim to keep fit as many people as possible from school children to the elderly by encouraging them to participate in a few physical exercises within their scope as part of their daily life (Council of Europe, 1979).

The question arose though about what was happening to physical education in school time. This question then, as now, was easier to ask than to answer. Very little hard information was available and very few surveys were done. Dr JE Kane’s survey in 1974, however, gives us a glimpse of trends in Britain. He examined secondary schools and found that the core of physical activity comprised six activities for boys.

1. Team Games.
2. Gymnastics.
3. Athletics.
4. Swimming.
5. Outdoor pursuits.
6. Dance.
The same six activities with some slight adjustments in rank order were found to make up the core of girls’ physical education programmes. In London, the curriculum was expanded to include ice skating, canoeing, sailing and horse riding for which facilities had to be hired and transport provided. The Queen allowed schools to use the riding school at Buckingham Palace free of charge. The Education Act of 1944 specifically forbade any fee being charged for a curriculum subject so that all these activities were provided for boys and girls without regard to their ability to pay (McIntosh, 1981).

Many PE programmes, however, drew children away from the protection of an educational environment to be coached and often exploited by adults to satisfy their ambitions rather than to meet the needs and interests of the children. In 1933, the British Syllabus of Physical Training in Schools listed and described 165 children's games and activities, none of them from the adult world, while the government's prescription for physical education in the primary years issued in 1972, showed nothing but adult stereotypes of games and sports apart from the sections on gymnastics and dance (DfE, 1970). In Sweden in 1980, the principal PE activities in secondary schools were stated to be gymnastics, dancing, ball games, athletics, orienteering, skating, skiing, swimming, as well as work techniques and theory (UNESCO, 1980).

In Sweden in the 1960s it was required that in addition to normal lessons in PE there should be four to eight open-air days each school year for skiing, skating, swimming and orienteering. All over Europe and America the trek to the great outdoors gathered pace. By 1968, outdoor education and school camping were regular parts of elementary or secondary school curricula in 16 countries (ICHPER, 1969).

Research in PE was another new feature in the 1960s and 1970s. Scholarly consideration of PE had been advocated in the US as early as 1885. In 1941, CH McCloy spearheaded a campaign to improve the quality of research and to convince the teaching profession of its relevance and importance. In the 1960s and 1970s the quality and quantity of research increased enormously but the results of research were often esoteric and of little value or interest to the teachers in school and as late in the century as 1980 the gap between the findings and their application by teachers remained to be bridged.

Several organisations with a specific interest in PE were founded in the 20th century. The Fédération Internationale d’Education Physique held a World Congress of School PE in 1969 which was attended by 39 countries. The International Council of Health, PE and Recreation, a specialist section of the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession was founded in 1958. The International Council of Sport and PE was formally established at the Olympic Games in Rome in 1960. UNESCO first expressed an interest in PE and sport in 1952. At its conference in Paris in 1976 UNESCO made 14 major recommendations emphasising that PE and sport were essential and constituent parts of education (ICHPER/UNESCO, 1977). In 1978,
UNESCO published an international charter on sport and physical education (UNESCO, 1978). By the end of the 1980s a struggle for control over the organisation of sport and physical education had developed and non-governmental agencies were no longer the sole authorities in this area. Many governments had taken an interest in PE and sport.
## Time Allocation for Physical Education in Primary Schools: 1999-2006

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Physical Education Programmes in Colleges of Education

CHURCH OF IRELAND COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Church of Ireland College of Education has provision for an undergraduate course for students studying for a B Ed. Degree. It is a small college with about 90 students and employs a part-time PE lecturer. A total of 42 hours is allocated to physical education across two years. In third year, students may choose an elective course covering 42 hours.

In 1st year the strands games, athletics, dance and outdoor and adventure are covered. Students are prepared to teach physical education to 1st and 2nd classes for teaching practice. A one-hour written exam on the PE curriculum is taken at the end of the year. In second year, all six strands are covered alongside health and fitness, biomechanics and exercise physiology. Students are prepared to teach PE to 5th/6th and infant classes. Evaluation consists of an essay assignment. In the third year elective course, all 6 strands are covered alongside health and fitness, biomechanics and exercise physiology. Issues concerning PE, such as inclusion, the role of the coach, sport v PE and curriculum development are discussed. Evaluation consists of continuous assessment involving keeping a journal on lectures and a short written exam.

While no named games are taught in 1st and 2nd year in the games strand skills such as striking, passing and travelling, as laid out in the PE curriculum, are taught. Cooperative games are covered also. There is no swimming pool in the college. In the aquatics strand students study water awareness, health and safety (integrated with SPHE) and how to organise taking a class to a swimming pool. Students taking the elective course participate in the Swim Organiser Award.

The college is well resourced with good up-to-date equipment. There are two small
halls and good outdoor facilities.

Differentiation and inclusion are alluded to during lectures when the need arises. How activities may be adapted for individual needs is discussed.

Students get instruction on two forms on assessment – self assessment and assessment of pupils. On teaching practice, students are encouraged to have clear objectives, to assess themselves at the end of the lesson on how they have achieved those objectives, to assess the pupils, visually, and to look and see if all the children have achieved the objectives.

**COLÁISTE MHUIRE, MARINO INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION**

Coláiste Mhuire, Marino Institute of Education, has provision for an undergraduate course for students studying for a B Ed. Degree. It offers a Higher Diploma in Education, also, to postgraduate students. In the undergraduate course students receive a total of 50 hours tuition in physical education over three years: 1st year – 21 hours, 2nd year – 8 hours, 3rd year – 21 hours. The six strands of the Primary School PE Curriculum are developed from infants to sixth class through continuity and progression over the three years of the B Ed. programme. In first year, the three strands, games, gymnastics and athletics are addressed for infants to 2nd classes. Theory sessions including background and content of the PE curriculum and lesson planning, organisation and safety for teaching practice are conducted. In second year, the three strands games, aquatics and athletics are addressed for middle and senior classes. Theory sessions including planning of schemes for teaching practice are conducted. In third year, the two strands outdoor and adventure and dance are introduced for the first time, alongside a recap of the other strands. Theory sessions including assessment and planning for first year of teaching are conducted. Reflective sessions are always provided after teaching practice. In the postgraduate course students receive 30 hours of tuition in physical education over 18 months. The six strands of the Primary School PE Curriculum are developed from infants to sixth class through continuity and progression over the 18 months of the postgraduate programme.

There is no module dealing specifically with inclusion, but advice is given during all activities on how to modify/adapt for differentiated needs. Handouts are given and Special Education Needs in Physical Education is discussed in lectures. Students are also given strategies for dealing with cerebral palsy, wheelchair-bound children and children with dyspraxia in their Special Education courses. Theory sessions deal with the assessment tools as recommended in the PE curriculum. Students are encouraged to adopt teacher observation as the main tool during teaching practice.

Assessment of students is only done twice over the B Ed. course due to TCD
regulations. This takes place in 1st year when students take a one-hour written curriculum-based exam. In 2nd year evaluation is made on an assessment of scheme and lesson plans for March teaching practice. There is no assessment in 3rd year. Postgraduate students are assessed on an IT-based assignment reviewing websites for primary physical education and on the scheme for final teaching practice. No marks are awarded for attendance with any group.

Extra-curricular courses are also offered outside of lecture time and take place in the evenings/weekends. Students can opt to take these in either 2nd or 3rd year (or at prescribed times in the case of the postgraduate course). Such courses include:

- **Aquatics**: Classroom issues and the practicalities of bringing a class to a swimming pool regarding insurance, ethics, liaising with instructors in the provision of a programme suitable for the children involved, are addressed in lecture time. Reference is made to programmes from RNLI and PAWS (Primary Aquatic Water Safety). On top of this, students may take (a) an aquatics organiser award organised by the college and IWA and (b) an aquatics pool assistant award based in Sean McDermott Street pool.

- **Games** – Gaelic football, hurling/camogie, soccer, volleyball. The college is supported by the GAA, FAI, Volleyball Association of Ireland. More courses are to be offered this coming year with the new facilities.

- **Outdoor and adventure** – trip to Carlingford adventure centre with group of students annually (funded by college SU and students themselves).

An elective course, Cluichí Gaelacha sa bhunscóil, is offered to 2nd year and postgraduate students. A new adapted PE elective is to run alongside this in 2007/8.

The college is well resourced with equipment and students have access to a new gymnasium, a classroom, an outdoor court, pitches and a dance area. There is no swimming pool.

**FROEBEL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

Froebel College of Education has provision for an undergraduate course for students studying for a B Ed. degree. It offers a Higher Diploma in Education, also, to postgraduate students. In the undergraduate course students receive a total of 40 hours tuition in physical education over three years. In 1st year they are prepared to teach infants – 2nd class in the five strands games, dance, athletics, outdoor and adventure and gymnastics. Two hours per strand is the allotted time. Their work for the year is assessed on a diary of reflections on the days’ lectures. In 2nd year all strands for 3rd and 4th classes are covered. Students are introduced to in-depth analysis of the 11
games mentioned in the PE curriculum, dealing with more than one game in each session. More time needs to be devoted to some games, such as basketball, than others. Students keep a diary as per 1st year and assessment of teaching-practice schemes, including three lesson plans and three evaluations, are included in the year’s evaluation. In 3rd year all strands for 5th and 6th classes are covered in the first five weeks in September and all strands for infants are covered for five weeks prior to teaching practice. Students are evaluated on teaching practice as per 2nd year. Students taking the Higher Diploma in Education have lectures every week for 30 weeks. Evaluation is in diary form and on teaching practice assessment. Differentiation is dealt with in lectures, and the need for it is apparent to students when they prepare for teaching practice.

At the very beginning of first year students are exposed to two full days devoted to Gaelic games, provided by the GAA – one day each to football coaching and hurling coaching. Aquatics is covered in 2nd year. Lectures deal with the organisation involved in bringing children to a pool for swimming lessons. Efforts are being made to gain access to a swimming pool for students to learn to swim. Heretofore, Rathmines pool was available to students in their own time. It was mainly Higher Diploma students who availed of this. Last year Kevin Murphy took an elective class in dance.

The college is well resourced with equipment and students have access to an allweather hockey pitch for the three strands athletics, games and outdoor and adventure and access to a gym for the two strands dance and gymnastics.

HIBERNIA COLLEGE

The aim of the Hibernia College programme is that students are encouraged to ensure a basic level of physical literacy and functional competence development of all the children of the school. It encourages the students to make PE a fun yet worthwhile experience for every child. The strands of the programme include athletics, dance, gymnastics, games, outdoor and adventure activities, aquatics and teaching methodologies – one onsite lecture per unit (9 a.m. – 5 p.m.)

Each of the strands of the new curriculum is given equal status in terms of time allocation. In general there are three aspects to time allocation. Lectures amount to four lessons at four hours per lesson of study for PE. Practical workshops and classes amount to almost two full weeks. Practical teaching involvement by the students occurs during normal in-class teaching practice. Each of the strands of the programme is given equal status in regards to content and assessment.

Students are assessed on the practical in-class teaching practice as well as through the development of model lesson plans over the full range of the strands of the
programme. The programme also provides continuous assessment procedure through MCQs and other formal assessment systems.

Students must include work for children with disabilities and special needs and show how this work is carried through and developed over the course of the class year. All lesson plans must have differentiated learning objectives followed by differentiated learning activities to meet additional learning needs of particular groups and/or individuals within the class.

Onsite practices are carried out in schools. All students are made familiar with the practicalities of working in real school environments. They are also provided with the opportunity to use equipment/materials which are readily available in schools. Tutors will always make students aware of best practice including the range of best materials/equipment available. Hibernia College ensures that all students are familiar with the use of all the normal range of equipment used in primary school PE. They are shown how to utilise the equipment correctly, and how to store and protect the equipment. The provision of a safe environment for PE is covered and instruction is given on how to ensure safety on all occasions.

MARY IMMACULATE COLLEGE

The Bachelor of Education Degree in Mary Immaculate College (MIC) is designed to qualify students to teach in the primary school. Given the structure of primary school provision, the teacher is required to have a mastery and competence in all the curricular areas of the primary school including physical education.

Each student in Mary Immaculate College will experience physical education across three semesters for a total of 36 hours during the undergraduate programme. 25 students can select physical education as an additional 48 hour pedagogical option in year 3 of the programme.

The physical education programme in MIC is pedagogically focused and reflects the curriculum for primary schools. The core values of primary physical education are reflected in the programme. The programme aims to equip students with the necessary skills, competencies, understanding and confidence to implement an effective physical education programme as well as a positive attitude towards physical education and a belief in the importance of physical activity in children’s lives. Semester 1 builds on the previous physical education experiences of the students and introduces strategies for effective teaching of physical education. Examples from the games and gymnastics strands are used. In Semester 2 the games and dance strands are used to develop and reinforce key concepts in teaching and learning in physical education. Semester 3 of the physical education experience focuses on some specific aspects of
teaching and learning in more detail eg, assessment, inclusion, and differentiation. Examples to further develop teaching and learning concepts are from the outdoor and adventure, athletics and aquatics strands. The physical education component of the graduate diploma in education involves a more condensed programme on similar themes across approximately 32 hours.

In all semesters a focus is placed on a varied experience and active involvement. A variety of learning experiences including presentations, film review and peer teaching are used to maximise student learning and understanding to allow for implementation in a school context. A number of peer teaching sessions are used to practice key teaching and learning concepts within the physical education area. Students are further required to teach physical education on all teaching-practice experiences during the programme. A preparation session specific to physical education is presented before each of the teaching practices.

Assessment within the three semesters of physical education can vary but will normally include at least one ‘practical’ exam where students are encouraged to develop their own personal confidence and competence in performance. A journal is kept in semester one of the programme where students are asked to demonstrate their understanding of key teaching and learning concepts. Presentations are also used to allow students to demonstrate understanding and application of a variety of topics. The pedagogical option and the graduate diploma in education programme are assessed using a variety of similar tools.

A number of opportunities are provided for students to gain additional expertise. The ‘Sports Coach’ programme runs on a weekly basis and allows students to gain certification at foundation level in a variety of sports. An occupational first aid course is run in the Spring semester. Additional coaching courses in Gaelic games are also provided in the Spring semester.

Physical education is housed in the Tailteann Building and delivered in two teaching spaces which are specifically designed for this purpose. There is also a large multi purpose sports hall for physical education use if required.

Differentiation within the physical-education area reflects the permeated model used throughout the programme and the model of differentiation used in MIC where it is considered in relation to content/process/product.

**ST PATRICK’S COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

St Patrick’s College of Education offers an undergraduate B Ed. degree course, a postgraduate course and an elective course in physical education. It also offers a Certificate – Diploma – Masters in PE course. In the undergraduate course students receive a total
of 48 hours tuition in physical education over two years. The strands of the PE curriculum are developed from infants to 6th classes with an emphasis on continuity and progression. Most of the time is spent engaging in practical work except where sessions are indicated as theory session which are classroom based. In 1st year the students are given an overview of Physical Education in the Primary School curriculum in one theory session. Games and gymnastics modules for infants to 2nd classes and the athletics module for infants to 6th class are covered. They have one theory session on lesson plans in preparation for teaching practice. In 2nd year games, gymnastics and athletics modules for 3rd to 6th classes and dance, outdoor and adventure activities and aquatics modules for infants to 6th classes are covered. They have one theory session on schemes of work in preparation for teaching practice. There is no course contact in 3rd year but students are expected to produce schemes of work in preparation for teaching practice.

As teachers are not required to actually teach swimming in the aquatics strand there is no pool-based instruction. One hour of tuition is, therefore, considered adequate given that SPHE covers safety issues and hygiene. The course deals with what can be addressed in the classroom and the practicalities of bringing a class to a swimming pool regrading insurance and liaising with instructors in the provision of a programme suitable for the children involved. Students are expected to know aquatics in the PE curriculum well. Gymnastics is allotted six hours of tuition. Students come to college with virtually no experience in gymnastics, hence allocation of time is very limited. In 2nd year students are offered voluntary extra-curricular courses in games, dance and aquatics. These are offered in addition to their course work. They are run as short evening or, in the case of dance, weekend courses. There is great demand for all of these courses. Over half of the students opt for one or more courses. These include games – Gaelic football, hurling, soccer, volleyball, Olympic handball, basketball, tag rugby – provided by National Governing Bodies such as GAA, FAI, Volleyball Association of Ireland and the IRFU. Individual tutors offer basketball and Olympic handball. A course in dance is offered by a specialist teacher. The majority of those taking aquatics choose a classroom-based three hour course over a pool-based course which is done in Seán McDermott Street swimming pool.

There are no modules dealing specifically with inclusion or assessment. Inclusion is dealt with incidentally as issues arise especially in preparation for teaching practice where students would have to deal with specific incidences in their classes. Some guidance in assessment is provided in sessions on the general course in assessment provided as part of students’ course in education. In their final teaching practice students have to focus in on a group of children and assessment in physical education would be included here.

Assessment of course work in 1st year is 90% attendance and participation and 10% a curriculum-based assignment. In 2nd year it is 50% attendance and participation and
50% on a written examination.

The college is well resourced with equipment and students have access to a classroom and a gymnasium. There are outdoor facilities but no hard surface area and poor changing facilities. There is no swimming pool.

In 3rd year students may choose physical education as an elective subject. Twenty five students may choose this option. A total of 48 hours on physical education or on occasion an adaptive PE Elective is offered. The general Physical Education Elective course focuses on building on the experience of students' first and second year course with modules related to each of the strands of the curriculum. There is an emphasis on some modelling of physical-education lessons using children from St Patrick’s primary school and on providing opportunities for some students to teach classes of children.

The post-graduate course is allotted 26 hours of physical education tuition. Assessment of coursework is 70% participation and attendance and 30% curriculum-based assignments.

A Certificate-Diploma-Masters course in Physical Education was due to begin in August 2007. The Certificate course has already been taken by 16 PCSP Trainers, 12 of whom completed the Diploma and three of whom progressed to the Masters.
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON OBESITY

Report of the National Task Force on Obesity 2005

The Report of the National Taskforce on Obesity (2005) stated that a balance of food intake and physical activity is necessary for a healthy weight. The Report indicated that children should be involved in at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity per day in order to prevent excess weight gain. Among the Report’s recommendations of particular relevance to primary schools were the following:

- All schools should be encouraged to develop consistent school policies to promote healthy eating and active living.
- The emphasis in all schools should be on increased physical activity including participation in sports.
- Every child should be enabled to achieve a minimum of 30 minutes physical activity per day.
- All schools should meet the minimum requirement of two hours of physical education per week delivered by appropriately-qualified staff.
- The Department of Education and Science should prioritise the provision and maintenance of physical education and physical activity facilities to address the issue of equality and access to all schools.
- Resources should be provided by the Department of Education and Science for adequate teacher training to support active living and healthy eating.
- The national parents’ organisations should work with parents and support them in encouraging healthy eating and active living.
- Every child should receive a safe and active passage to school through the provision of safe walkways, cycleways or transport.

The INTO in response, demanded that all schools be provided with proper facilities in order to enable teachers to implement the full PE curriculum. The Union also reiterated the view that schools alone cannot solve the problem of obesity.

Early Bird Diabetes study

For the past seven years the Early Bird Diabetes study, directed by Terence Wilkin, Professor of Endocrinology and Metabolism at Peninsula Medical School and based at Derriford Hospital, Plymouth, has monitored children’s activity levels and health in an attempt to track the childhood roots of diabetes. It has found that children’s activity levels are governed by an internal mechanism that may be pre-set before birth. In other words, how much energy children expend may be determined by their genes. Wilkin’s
research led him to suspect that it was not the environment that determined activity but some central biological mechanism within each child, which he called an “activitystar”.

The “activitystar” hypothesis emerged after trials suggested that no matter how much or how little exercise children were offered, they found their own level. In one trial of seven to 10 year olds, who were fitted with accelerometers, the total physical activity of the children was similar because those who had little provision in school (1.8 hours as opposed to nine hours per week) compensated with large amounts of activity when they got home. “There was no relationship between the school attended and the amount of activity undertaken. Clearly, the total amount of activity done by primary school children does not depend on how much PE they do at school.”

Professor Wilkin claims that children who exercise more seem generally healthier. He asked whether it was possible to get inactive children to do more. The study has looked at the relationship between fatness and activity. The data suggests that activity responds to weight rather than weight to activity – that heavier people exercise less. Professor Wilkin is not proposing that children should give up exercise, which has many benefits, both social and physical. Children who are more active have better metabolic health but he claims that they are not necessarily slimmer.

**Other research**

Separate research, carried out in Glasgow and published in the *BMJ*, supports the Early Bird conclusions that increasing physical activity has no effect on BMI.

The ESRI (2006) also examined the link between participation in sports and obesity and weight. In their primary sample of 5th and 6th class children, 3.8% of boys and 4.3% of girls were obese and a further 15.7% of boys and 15.8% of girls were overweight. However, there was no strong pattern of association between participation in sport and obesity and weight. It is thought that the lack of relationship between physical activity and risk of obesity may arise because measures of physical activity may not capture real variations in energy expenditure or because variations in energy expenditure are too small to counteract the effects on weight of other factors such as diet. However, there is some indication that high levels of exercise, well in excess of minimum recommended levels may have an effect on body mass.

Research from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (Alspac), using data from the ‘Children of the 90s Project’, suggests that an extra 15 minutes a day of moderate or vigorous physical activity halved the risk of obesity in 12-year-old children. Andy Ness, co-director of Alspac, says, regarding the Early Bird study, that “we cannot rule out the possibility that obesity leads to a reduction in physical activity rather than the other way round, but the fact that these associations were observed across the range of fat mass rather than just in obese children makes this explanation less likely”. He goes on to say that this is an important observation, even if the associ-
ations are due to reverse causality and obesity leads to reduced activity, as reduced physical activity in obese people may be harmful to health (The Times Monday, 23 April 2007).

In a study of adults undertaken in Louisiana State University, led by Dr Claude Bouchard, physiologist, it was found that genes could have strong impact on how receptive people are to exercise. It was found that genes could be responsible for those who exercise hard but cannot lose weight. He claims that people are either “high-responders” or “low-responders” or “non-responders” to exercise. It was found that people who exercise the same amount do not all get the same benefits and it appears to be in the genes. Dr Bouchard is now trying to identify which genes are responsible for receptiveness to exercise (Irish Independent Saturday, 18 August 2007).

**INTO Survey 2005**

In January 2005, a survey of INTO members in counties Clare, Tipperary and Waterford (238 members took part) was carried out. Respondents were asked to estimate the number of children in their class they considered overweight. Of the teachers surveyed 213 were class teachers who had, between them, 5,108 pupils. One in 10, a total of 531 (10.4%) children were perceived as being overweight; 128 children, one in 40 (2.5%) children were perceived as being obese. These results are significantly lower than the North South Survey of Height, Weight and Body Mass Index in Ireland, 2002 where 28% of Irish nine year olds were recorded as overweight and 8.5% as obese. Almost 90% of respondents felt that children did not get sufficient exercise at home. Teachers were evenly divided in their opinion on whether pupils received sufficient exercise at school with 46.2% answering “yes” and 49.2% answering “no”. The remainder either didn’t respond or replied “don’t know”.

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Physical Education Programmes in Colleges of Education
Appendix 4

Facilities and Resources

**INTO SURVEY 2004**

The INTO carried out a snapshot survey of primary schools in four counties in relation to the availability of a PE hall in 2004. The findings were as follows:

1. 80% of schools in Donegal did not have a PE hall.
2. 63% of schools in Clare did not have a PE hall.
3. 70% of schools in Kerry did not have a PE hall.
4. 14% of schools in Dublin did not have a PE hall.

**INTO SURVEY 2006 (EDUCATION CONFERENCE)**

The INTO asked delegates (approximately 300) who attended the Consultative Conference on Education in 2006 to indicate the availability of facilities in their schools for teaching the PE curriculum. The findings were as follows:

1. 31.6% of respondents did not have a hall.
2. 11.8% did not have a suitably-surfaced school yard.
3. 60.7% did not have a GP room.
4. 23.1% did not have a playing field.
SURVEY (STAFF REPRESENTATIVES TRAINING COURSE) MAY 2007

At a training course for 21 staff representatives in the Limerick area, participants were asked to indicate the availability of facilities in their schools for the teaching of the PE curriculum. The responses were as follows:

- 15 schools have a hall.
- 15 have a field.
- 11 use a spare room.
- 2 use a green area.
- 16 use school yard.
- 1 replied no facilities.
- 10 stated that they considered PE facilities in their schools inadequate.

Participants commented that even where there was a school hall or playing field, they were often too small. Four mentioned that aquatics were unrealistic because of lack of facilities, and where children received aquatic education parents had to finance the activity.

INTO SURVEY OF SCHOOLS IN CLARE, TIPPERARY AND WATERFORD (INTO, SPHE, 2005)

**Impediments to PE Teaching**

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No indoor facilities</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lack of Resources</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ideas/Inspiration/Expertise</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Time/Curriculum Overload</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Appendix 5

Useful Resources for Teachers

**PCSP**

The PCSP in association with the SDPS have jointly drawn up planning prompts and templates in consultation with the DES and NCCA to assist schools in working through a development planning process in Physical Education.

As part of the PCSP service the Regional Curriculum Support Service (RCSS) have appointed cuiditheoirí to support all subjects, including PE, to offer support in planning for the implementation and in developing content and methodologies. They are available to visit schools or they can be accessed through education centres.

**PRIMARY SCHOOLS SPORTS INITIATIVE**

The PSSI has produced a DVD on resource materials for teaching physical education in primary schools. The materials have been designed to assist teachers to implement five of the six strands and includes lesson plans, warm-up/cool-down exercises and tips from infants to 6th classes on: athletics, dance, games, gymnastics, and outdoor and adventure activities.

**IPPEA**

The Irish Primary PE Association was founded in 2002 by and for primary teachers
who were particularly interested in the subject of physical education. The IPPEA is an association dedicated to heightening awareness of PE issues in primary schools and it aims to promote physical activity in an educational context. The IPPEA aims to:

- represent and support the needs of primary teachers involved in physical education;
- support the promotion of physical education and healthy lifestyles in primary school;
- hold, organise and participate in conferences and workshops for the purpose of promoting PE at primary level;
- keep members up-to-date on the latest issues and developments in PE and related areas;
- liaise with other organisations involved in the promotion of PE.

(www.irishprimarype.com)

The IPPEA conducts summer courses in PE in association with education centres around the country. InTouch magazine has published practical articles on PE contributed by IPPEA members.

**PE PAYS**

At the PE PAYS research forum held in the University of Limerick, June 2006, a group dedicated to sharing ideas for future development of primary PE in Ireland was proposed. This group is made up of a variety of stakeholders in Irish primary physical education – Colleges of Education PE lecturers (responsible for the pre-service PE training of teachers), Irish Primary PE training of teachers, Irish Primary PE Association (subject association dedicated to the promotion of PE), Primary Curriculum Support Programme (responsible for the mediation of the physical education curriculum to qualified Irish primary teachers), HSE Physical Activity co-ordinators and others interested in furthering the cause of PE in Irish primary schools.

Since then, a number of informal meetings have been held sharing practice and information regarding PE and the sharing of ideas has been a benefit to all. The collective experience and expertise of the group may be of benefit to any group seeking information on the various initiatives and programmes working to promote quality physical education and physical activity in our schools.

The group is in the process of devising and sending out information and contact details to various bodies. The initial contact for the group is Susan Marron in St Patrick’s College – susan.marron@spd.dcu.ie
ACTIVE SCHOOL AWARDS

This initiative provides guidelines on PE lessons, playground games, athletics, gymnastics and dance (complete with video and music). The aims of the initiative are:

- to raise awareness of the value and importance of physical education in primary schools;
- to acknowledge the professional contribution of the class teacher as the driving force for physical education activity in the school;
- to make explicit the learning opportunities afforded by PE;
- to generate the support and involvement of the wider school community during the course of the Active School Week;
- to acknowledge the creativity, initiative and commitment of a school community to the promotion of a physically-educated school population.

In addition the initiative promotes goals such as:

- The importance of enjoyment.
- Maximum participation by children in physical activities.
- Development of skills and understanding.
- Gender equity.
- Balance and breadth – consideration of as many strands of the PE curriculum as possible.

Further information can be accessed on the Active School Awards website www.activeschoolawards.ie

LOCAL SPORTS PARTNERSHIPS (LSP)

The Irish Sports Council (ISC) established the Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) initiative as it was recognised as an excellent mechanism for delivering recreational sport to local people. Key tasks that the partnerships are involved in include:

- increasing sport-facility usage;
- the creation and implementation of plans for long-term local sports development at a local level;
- sustainable structures to assist all those involved in local sports development, helping them to face the associated challenges – eg, recruiting and managing volunteers and quality training.
The three Main Functions of the LSPs are as follows:

1. **Information:** Establish consultative Fora, undertake research and identify local needs.

2. **Education**
   - Code of Ethics.
   - Club Development Training.
   - Small Club Development Grants.
   - Children’s Officer Training.
   - First Aid.
   - NCTC Coaching Courses.
   - Workshops for range of projects, inducing capital sports grant.

3. **Implementation:** Prepare a strategy, deliver programmes and market and promote sport. LSPs act as a vital link between the needs of local people, the work of other sports organisations/officers and national agencies and state agencies.

The key aims of the LSP are to increase participation in sport, and to ensure that local resources are used to best effect. Some of the outcomes the ISC seek are:

- Club development.
- Volunteer training.
- Enhanced planning of sport at local level.
- Local directories of sports bodies and facilities.
- School, club, community and national governing body (NGB) links.
- Increased levels of local participation, especially amongst specific target groups such as older people, girls and women, people with disabilities, unemployed people, and those who live in identified disadvantaged communities.

In general, all statutory bodies, organisations and groups operating in local areas with a responsibility for or interest in sports development are invited to participate in the LSP. These include the Vocational Education Committees (VEC), city and county councils, Health Service Executive (HSE), FÁS, universities, colleges, Institutes of Technology, commercial companies, sports clubs, national governing bodies (NGBs) and community groups. Additional information is available from: eclarke@irishsportscouncil.ie

**BUNTÚS**

The Buntús programme was developed and is implemented by the Participation Unit of the Irish Sports Council (ISC). The nineteen existing Local Sports Partnerships
deliver the Buntús play and Buntús multi-sport programmes to support teachers and other adults in introducing young people to sport, and in helping them to develop their interests. The Buntús programme is delivered in support of the physical education programme. Through Buntús, children are given access to a wide variety of sports so that they can develop their interest and skills in an essentially fun and non-competitive environment.

The three key components of the programme – training, resource cards and equipment – are designed to provide an easy-to-understand, but high-quality introduction to sport. The Buntús programme is nationally co-ordinated by the ISC Participation Unit and locally delivered by the Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) and seeks to:

- raise the profile of physical education and sport;
- improve inservice-training opportunities for teachers;
- assist governing bodies of sport (GBs) to develop and deliver appropriate support for teachers;
- provide enjoyable and meaningful activity for children;
- support delivery of the national curriculum.

Each participating school receives a Buntús sports equipment bag and three hours training for the whole school staff in how to use the equipment. This training can be followed at a later stage by specific training provided by such organisations as the FAI, Badminton Ireland or Golf Ireland. The delivery of the Buntús programme includes opportunities for all young people to take part, regardless of their ability, gender, ethnicity or background. The ISC's responsibility is to ensure that opportunities are accessible, that publicity/promotion reflects open access and that teachers are supported to implement this. Therefore, it is only schools and teachers who have undergone a programme of Buntús training that can access the equipment and resource cards as the training is critical to the programme.

COACHING PROGRAMMES IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

GAA

There are full time GAA coaches in every county, who are encouraged to visit as many schools as possible. Most county schools are visited annually, especially in rural areas as GAA games are parish based. The role of the coach includes making contact with local GAA clubs (parish-based) who nominate a person who will coach the children. S/he has to fulfil the GAA coaching qualification requirements. So, the full time GAA coach acts as a co-ordinator between locally appointed coaches.

Monies spent on schools come from the county GAA board to whom schools apply
directly for funding. Each local board is allocated an annual funding budget. The budget allocated to primary schools is mainly for coaching gear eg, hurleys, balls. Primary schools organise mini leagues, skills award schemes (emphasis here is rewarding skill not competitiveness among children) and blitzes (getting away from schools competing against schools, instead having a mixture of children on teams to encourage participation). Some funding is available for these activities.

CÉIM AR AGHAIDH

Céim ar Aghaidh/Step Ahead uses Gaelic games to deliver a range of exercises to support the primary school curriculum for all subjects. The Céim ar Aghaidh resource can be used to support teaching in a variety of subject areas and the exercises can be adapted to suit children of varying abilities through differentiated worksheets.

Currently there are two separate resources to cater for primary school teachers – the Senior Cycle and Middle Cycle resources. The Senior Cycle resource has been developed for Primary 7 in Northern Ireland and 5th and 6th classes in Republic of Ireland. The Middle Cycle resource has been developed for Primary 6 in Northern Ireland and 3rd/4th Classes in the Republic of Ireland. Teacher notes are colour coded in Section 1 with references to the photocopiable worksheets in Section 2. The resources section provides a comprehensive list of resources, which can be used in conjunction with this pack.

In addition, a DVD has been produced in association with RTE Sport, covering the subjects of Gaeilge, English, SESE and SPHE. This DVD will be of interest to pupils from first to sixth classes.

A supplementary reading book for children which deals with the topic of healthy eating is also included in the pack. This book was produced with the support of Bord Bia and Safefood.

The website www.ceim.gaa.ie will be of particular interest to teachers as it contains supplementary worksheets for the senior and middle classes. Meanwhile, a Gaelscoileanna section supplies all the material in Irish.

In addition, the recently-launched Fun Do programme is a comprehensive, multi-media pack available for teachers and coaches who wish to follow a programme of GAA training with children.

FAI

The FAI recently launched their 2007 – 2010 Schools’ Plan. This has seen the co-ordination of soccer coaching in over 900 primary schools through the Buntús programme. Schools participating in the Buntús programme are offered specific training in soccer coaching three months after the initial Buntús training. A soccer bag is provided, with equipment such as cones, balls, bibs and goal posts and three hours training for inter-
ested staff. In addition, drill cards and an information booklet are included to assist teachers.

**IRFU**

The Irish Rugby Football Union does not have a nationally co-ordinated programme of coaching for schools. Each province takes responsibility for developing the sport at school level and the implementation of the IRFU Long Term Player Development Model – ‘From 6 to 6 Nations’. Each province has a Regional Development Officer, responsible for the appointment of Youth Development Officers who are available to schools – primary and secondary – for coaching sessions. In addition, mini-coaching sessions are held regularly and the IRFU encourages teachers to take part.

**Bizzy-Break! A physical activity break for children**

*Bizzy-Break* is a programme compiled by the Irish Heart Foundation and consists of a series of activities which move all parts of the child’s body and improve key fitness components of flexibility, strength and aerobic fitness and takes no more than 10 minutes. The pack includes teacher’s notes, a classroom poster and a CD.
Our aim for today is to provide you all with the opportunity to listen to expert speakers, to discuss and to question and hopefully obtain some answers about a very important subject namely – physical education in the primary school.

Sligo is famous for its natural beauty sea, rivers, lakes and mountains. To the North of us, under Ben Bulben, lies WB Yeats and to the west of Sligo we have Knocknarea mountain reputed to be the birthplace of that fiery Queen of Connacht, Queen Maeve. Legend has it that her warriors buried her on top of Knocknarea in a standing position facing the Eastern sunrise. It’s her association with another legendary hero during the Brown Bull of Cooley saga, namely Cú Chulainn, or Setanta, as he was known when a boy, that I’d like to mention. He achieved instant fame when he drove his sliotar with amazing accuracy and skill down the throat of Culainn’s unfortunate hound and became ancient Ireland’s most famous hurler. Hurling is one of our great national games involving skill, speed, stamina and endurance once famously described as the Riverdance of sport. Sport and games are an important part of physical education but there are other aspects that are equally important.

History helps us to understand how physical education developed and hopefully points us in the right direction for the future. Early and ancient societies generally took part in physical education because it was necessary for human survival. They needed to be able to flee quickly or stand and fight. With the development of cities in Greece and Rome came the Roman baths and the Greek gymnasium. Throughout history the training of warriors and soldiers is a recurring theme. The Renaissance period was characterised by new ideas and thoughts, they also took into account the writings of Marcus Galen the Roman writer and other classical sources.

The aftermath of World War II brought a renewed interest in preparing boys and young men for war. This developed through time into genuine advancements in PE, movement education, educational gymnastics, dance, outdoor pursuits and the development of research in PE. Governments became involved also.
So where do we stand now at the present time? Looking at this slide, we have on one side the Primary School Curriculum 1999 and on the other, the findings of a survey carried out in English secondary schools by JE Kane in 1974. Here in Ireland at the time of the 1974 study in England, PE had just become an obligatory subject with the introduction of the 1971 curriculum.

**Physical Education Curricula**

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<tr>
<th>Primary Curriculum 1999</th>
<th>Survey of English Secondary Schools, JE Kane, 1974</th>
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<tr>
<td>Athletics</td>
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<td>Dance</td>
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<td>Gymnastics</td>
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<td>Outdoor and Adventure</td>
<td>Outdoor Pursuits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aquatics</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
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Facilities for PE need to comply with health and safety regulations. Schools may have access to some outdoor facilities but the number of primary schools with adequate indoor facilities is very few. Some schools will have a store of small apparatus built up at this stage but the number of schools with large apparatus again is few. Funding is a major issue and I’m sure you will have something to say about it later.

Is inservice and continuing professional development going to be available to teachers in the future? As we speak, St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra hopes to offer an Inservice Certificate/Diploma course in PE in 2008 but opportunities like this for teachers to upskill if they wish to do so are rare.

Should we consider here today a role for a specialist PE teacher within the primary system or are we satisfied that all PE teaching in primary should be done by the generalist?

A swimming pools audit would be an excellent dive into the deep end of the aquatics strand. Where are the pools in relation to the schools they serve? Can new pools be built if needed? Is the aquatics strand of the curriculum sinking or swimming? At best, it is just treading water. Swimming gives many children immense pleasure not to mention many new physical skills acquired in a non-competitive environment, but swimming also gives many schools immense pain in funding, organising and timetabling swimming lessons.

In conclusion, I would like to pose a few questions for you to think about and make a few closing remarks. Do you think PE in primary schools has status? Do you think, for instance, it is as important as literacy and numeracy or even history or geography?
Are there areas of the curriculum that are a problem for schools? I mentioned the aquatics strand earlier. What about gymnastics and outdoor and adventure activities for instance? If there are problems, what are the possible solutions?

I have a concern that we may let the ‘99 curriculum lose impetus just like we did with the ‘71 curriculum. We are very good in this country when it comes to new ideas but how are we for the long haul? The fact that PE was one of the last subjects to be ‘inserviced’ would not fill you with confidence for its future prospects.

I have another concern that we may have made our world very cosy and not very physically challenging for our children. In the last generation, children, even in rural areas, have become divorced from the land. In the towns, street games are a thing of the past. JF Kennedy wrote an article before he became President entitled *The Soft American*. He advocated that all American citizens should take responsibility for their own fitness and that of their children. Have we reached that stage now?

I would love you all to leave here today having listened, debated and discussed physical education in the primary school and then return home past Ben Bulben and the poet’s resting place, past Knocknarea and Queen Maeve, or through the Curlew mountains past the mounted warrior on the hillside. And on your return home, I am asking you to begin the fight at school, union or any other level for physical education. Physical education is a right for every primary school pupil and an absolute necessity in the world we find ourselves in today. Physical education needs funding. If Setanta walked in here today and wished to go and slay another hound, we could not let him go without kitting him out with helmet, ball and sliotar – no change from €100.

Whether you use a camán, the pen that is mightier than the sword or your oratorial skills to persuade, cajole and demand that physical education be given its rightful and deserved place among the subjects of the curriculum – please don’t be the hurler on the ditch. It was Liam Griffin who made the statement that hurling is the *Riverdance* of sport, let us try to make physical education the *Riverdance* of the curriculum.

As they said in Rome – Let the games begin. Warriors choose your weapons.
Thank you very much Declan and good morning to everybody here. I am here today to talk around the area of PE and in particular the integration of PE with other subjects. I hope to link my thoughts on the subject to the discussion document that was prepared for this conference. The first thing that struck me in the document itself was a quote from a teacher who stated that “integration is something that isn’t new – it has been around for donkey’s years”. This brought me back to when I was in training college back in Mary Immaculate. Many of the lecturers back then in the ‘90s would have spoken about the “hidden curriculum”. Going back to the discussion document again there was another quote, which I will paraphrase. The teacher said “sometimes when I am teaching, something might happen when I’m in the middle of a class and it is okay to stop to go with what happens in the class, if the children are motivated, or interested, and just maybe to tell a story to extend their learning that way”. I think that is a very important facet of teaching and I hope it is a part of teaching that never dies. I think all of us here this morning remember teachers from our days in primary and secondary school. These teachers would have been very good at that particular skill of knowing when to run with something to enrich the learning that goes on in class.

I want to look at integration in a slightly more structured manner this morning; this
is a quote from the Curriculum you might take a moment to read it.

“Integration gives children’s learning a broader and richer perspective, emphasises the interconnectedness of knowledge and ideas and reinforces the learning process”

Primary School Curriculum, Introduction p.16

I have just picked out a few key words. Integration should be broad; it shouldn’t have a narrow focus. Its purpose is to enrich learning: like the teacher telling a story to the class except it is happening in a more structured way. One of the main ideas behind it is that it helps children to connect knowledge and reinforce the learning process. The Primary Curriculum Introduction tells us that kids don’t necessarily look at the subject boundaries – they like to connect ideas within subjects. I suppose all this together helps children and helps teachers to reinforce the learning that is happening in classrooms, happening in the gym and happening in the yard.

I’d like to draw your attention to a statement used in the PCSP seminar on integration.

“Integration that is organised in such a way that it cuts across subject-matter lines, bringing together various aspects of curriculum into meaningful association to focus on broad areas of study”

Shoemaker, (1991)

Shoemaker says that integration should be organised, it doesn’t happen incidentally. This echoes what the curriculum says about integration. That it is weaving subjects together so children can make meaning out of the learning. The meanings should be coming from the objectives so there are meaningful associations. Going back to the discussion document there was a quote from one of the teachers who said that integration, if it is happening all the time, you wouldn’t get anything done. So integration is something that should be happening in a focused way – but not all the time, because it just wouldn’t work. The last point is the idea of a broad focus. In the PCSP, in the training colleges and in our own work we look at the idea of themes. One theme that comes to mind, and I know that Sean Gallagher and Orla Walsh will speak about this later, is the idea of the Active School Awards, which is a very valid theme for integration. There is a huge amount of positive work going on in that particular area throughout schools around the country.

I would like to quote from the NCCA, who stated “the integrated nature of the primary school curriculum should be exemplified for teachers to a much greater extent than it is” (NCCA, 2005). In its report on the phase one of the review of curriculum implementation, the NCCA said integration in the primary school should be exemplified or developed in a more practical way than it has up to now. There is a
certain value in talking about integration in a presentation like this or in writing, but when integration is actually demonstrated in practice, where teachers can see it going on and observe it, there is more value in that. The benefits that accrue from integration, according to the NCCA are:

- development of children’s English language skills;
- alleviate the time pressures experienced by teachers.

Integration, therefore, will help develop children’s language across all subjects and I think a very valid point. Another very important point for us is that integration would actually help teachers alleviate the time burdens that they face. So integration can actually help us make our job more manageable.

In the context of PE I am going to look at the idea of the theme or the broad focus as Schoemaker would have called it. Today, I’m going to look at the theme of parachute activities. Over the last couple of years I have been lucky enough to have gone into schools as a PE cuiditheoir and some schools would have been using the parachute for donkeys years, others would never had heard of the parachute. It is a fantastic piece of equipment. It is very motivating. Children from infants to 6th class love it. It is very inclusive it can be used in five of the strands. What some people don’t realise is that it can actually be used for flexibility exercises, it can be used for strengthening exercises for the upper body and again just to repeat myself, children absolutely love it.

I am going to look at just three subjects in a tighter focus – PE, SPHE and oral language. Just to refer to the phrase that Shoemaker used “meaningful association”, I have picked out a number of objectives from the 1st and 2nd class curriculum.

The first one is that in the PE class children play playground games, the second one is that that they would become aware of safety issues and how actually to use equipment safety when in class and the third one is that they would talk and develop their skills – that is the understanding and appreciation objective in the PE lesson. In the SPHE objectives, the first SPHE objective would actually occur in the PE class so you are actually covering SPHE in your PE class and then the last one would be the idea of exploring conflict. The parachute throws up situations of conflict so children have the opportunity to learn how to manage conflict in a very practical way. In oral language, the first objective deals with every description and every instruction that you give in the PE class. The other three would actually happen in discrete oral language time, in the classroom. You can actually use the stimulus of the parachute, possibly using photographs and so on to get the children to talk about the activities that they engaged in. Listing their favourite activities and being able to actually talk back and tell you how to play the activities. So in that way you are actually reinforcing what goes on in the PE class and hence it will make the next PE class easier for both children and teacher.

I would like to refer back to the study of the NCCA and the recommendation that there should be very practical exemplars on how to promote integration. The PE and
SPHE cuiditheoir service at present has 14 people. We have a team that is genuinely very enthusiastic about physical education in our schools, many of whom have postgraduate qualifications in primary PE so they are very knowledgeable on the subject. The service we offer responds to needs in the school. If a school contacts us and says it needs help with dance, for example, we would actually go in and offer help in very practical way. We can help with planning, whether it is whole school planning, short-term planning, long-term planning or planning for integration – we actually can go in and help teachers do that. We can look at resources, be it sourcing resources or using resources that have been in the school for years. I think the most important part of our service is the idea of modelling lessons. The idea that the cuiditheoir will go in to the classroom and the teacher can sit and observe the class working through an actual lesson in PE in a strand that maybe that teacher isn’t particularly comfortable with.

Two final points – last year we offered support in PE and SPHE to 1,365 schools. This year, for PE alone, so far we have applications for 777 schools. There is no cut off date for applications. If anybody here would wish to have somebody model lessons in their school, please feel free to contact us. Our website address is www.pcs.ie. Any of you that would like to apply for support can do so through this website address.

I would like to thank you for your attention. I would also like to thank the INTO for their invitation. I genuinely do think that it is a great thing to have 250 teachers or so here on a Saturday morning, on your day off, talking about PE. It really shows how enthusiastic we are about PE and hopefully the day will yield positive results for PE in our schools.
PHYSICAL EDUCATION POLICY IN IRELAND: 
THE CHALLENGES AND THE POTENTIAL

Mary O’Sullivan, Professor and Dean, Faculty of Education and Health Sciences, 
University of Limerick

I was requested in this presentation to the INTO Educational Conference to discuss physical education policy in Ireland with particular reference to the challenges and potential for physical education in primary schools. Let me begin with the take home message of this presentation which is that a key policy challenge is to develop an infrastructure that will ensure more young people are more active more often. Such an infrastructure is the foundation to a set of high quality physical education programmes in schools that will sustain young people’s positive attitudes to and engagement in physically active lifestyles over time. This vision is that all young people in our schools can live active, caring and healthy lives and their educational experiences in school around physical education, sport and physical activity will support them to be physically active.

I am heartened that the INTO has taken up this challenge in allocating significant time this morning to a discussion of physical education in primary education. I also congratulate you, the participants, for being here in such large numbers to consider physical education policies and practices in the primary school sector. I look forward to discussions later this morning by the delegates on recommendations to ensure quality physical education at all primary schools. I hope these ideas are followed up at the annual conference of the INTO with recommendations on physical education policy and best practices brought forward to the membership and to the government.

A key message of this presentation is that getting more young people physically active is a societal and not just a school challenge with different agencies and personnel playing important and mutually interdependent roles to provide high quality physical education, recreation, and sporting experiences for children and youth in an Irish context. Teachers must be supported in their role in achieving a nation of young people who are regularly engaged in healthy and active lifestyles. Young people must also be provided with the knowledge to become critical consumers of the nation’s sport, recreation and leisure culture with teachers and parents advocates for an Irish society that supports equitable access for high quality physical education and physical activity experiences for all. Such an approach has implications for teacher education, career long professional development and the relationships between teachers, government departments, and various private and public agencies concerned with children’s welfare and well-being. To borrow a well-known phrase, I suggest “it takes a village to raise a caring healthy active young person”. This means that it takes primary school
teachers, physical education specialists and parents to promote physical education with children. It takes teachers and teacher unions to ensure equal status for physical education in the school curriculum, it takes government agencies to support an infrastructure for physical education in schools and it takes local communities to collaborate with schools in ensuring access to adequate facilities to provide a high quality physical education experience for young people at school.

**Physical education’s contribution to the education of young people**

Physical education is a key opportunity in the curriculum to work with children to develop their skills, knowledge and dispositions, to establish and sustain a balanced active and healthy lifestyle. PE is the only educational experience where the focus is on the body, its movement and physical development, and it helps children learn to respect and value their own bodies and abilities, and those of others. The aim of a high quality physical education programme is to develop physical competence so that children are able to move efficiently, effectively and safely and understand what, why and how they are doing. Its outcomes embrace commitment, confidence, willing participation, knowledge and understanding and acquisition of generic skills, positive attitudes, active lifestyle and activity enjoyment.

Physical education makes a unique contribution to the overall development of young children. The Physical Education Association of Ireland (PEAI) have developed an advocacy pack designed to assist teachers in outlining, for various audiences, the particular and unique contribution of physical education to students’ long term health and wellbeing. The DVD will help to place teachers in a favourable position when key decisions are being made which may impact on physical education (http://www.peai.org/). I challenge the INTO to work collaboratively to develop a physical education advocacy resource. The PEAI, the Irish Primary Physical Education Association (IPPEA) and the Colleges of Education are content experts to help develop such an advocacy resource for primary teachers. This could be done quite easily and for little cost. The DVD could be adapted and presented at every national school to speak to boards of management, to parents, to teachers, and to students to actually talk about the importance of physical education in the school curriculum. Such an advocacy process won’t cost a lot of money. Rather it needs a commitment by the INTO to its development.

**Growing attention to healthy active lifestyles**

There has been a lot of attention in recent years to health and physical activity levels among the Irish population. There have been a myriad of national reports (eg, National Obesity Taskforce, National Health Promotion Strategy, Oireachtas
Committee Reports on Physical Education and Women in Sport) as well as Irish Sport Council’s policy documents (*Sport for Life, Pathways in Irish Sport, European Year of Education Through Sport, and Longterm Involvement in Sport and Physical Activity*) that have focused and brought attention back to the role and function of physical education in Irish schools. This recent attention and action in some areas is quite positive as there has been benign neglect of physical education infrastructure and programmes for several decades. The existence of these reports and policies is impacting what is happening on the ground and things are beginning to move forward in terms of programming and professional development, and facilities in some place have improved.

The following are key findings and recommendations from some of documents which are related to school physical education. In 2004, the *Women in Sport Report* (2004) from an Oireachtas Committee noted:

- Physical education needs to be enhanced not only in terms of its quantity but also its quality.
- Physical education in primary and secondary schools is under resourced and they called for a strategic plan for physical education.
- The report also noted that physical education is absolutely a critical area in encouraging females to become involved in physical activity.
- The report noted that the most significant obstacle to girls’ participation is the absence of well-constructed and resourced physical education programmes in primary schools.
- The challenge is to get primary school girls excited and interested and for them to know that physical activity is important and useful to them.

The *National Taskforce on Obesity* (2005) also commented on the role of physical education in decreasing the rising levels of inactive people in the country. They noted:

- The DES should prioritise the provision and maintenance of physical education and physical activity facilities to address the issue of equity and access in all schools.
- School physical education programmes and community recreation programmes represent effective ways of influencing adolescent physical activity levels.
- All schools should meet the minimum requirement of two hours of physical education per week delivered by appropriately qualified staff (60 mins at primary level).
- There must be co-ordination between government departments for shared use of school and community facilities.

9 http://www.irishsportscouncil.ie/
The Third Report on the Status of Physical Education (2005) noted:

“When we re-consider the societal context in which PE is being provided there is no doubt but that it (PE) must be used to tackle the problem of declining levels of physical activity among children and to encourage young people to get involved in physical activity and sport after school” (p. 19).

It went on to say that:

“It is a simple fact that Ireland lags behind other nations in the provision of physical education. The time allocation, financial allocation, original training, ongoing training and ongoing improvement of the PE infrastructure is considerably less than in most countries.”

It suggested Ireland should look at how it is done elsewhere as “the continental model…sees a far greater utilisation of community facilities and this is a model that we will have to look at” (p. 34).

There has not been significant enough funding and investment in PE since the 1970s yet these reports and some recent investments in physical education are the beginning of many steps needed to try and change that. The report noted teaching of physical education in the primary school “has been particularly neglected and massive investment is urgently needed” (p. 4). Four recommendations had been made in submissions to the committee to address these issues. The recommendations were to consider:

- Physical education as a degree subject with specialisation in primary school?
- Physical education to be taught by trained primary teachers in primary schools?
- Physical education teachers shared between primary schools.
- Primary teachers are the best persons to teach physical education. This is currently the position of the INTO.

The Oireachtas Committee recommended that “in light of what we know now about the importance of PE for young children that the view expressed (ie, about physical education taught by the primary school teacher) will not allow the situation to change as much as it needs to”. This was not to suggest that primary teachers can’t do the job – but that if we want to change the current situation then we need to look at supplementation to the role of the primary school teacher and this is a recommendation I would favour.

Support and infrastructure for physical education

Primary school principals are incredibly supportive of physical education. In a recent survey, where 1400 surveys were returned from 3200 mailed to primary school primary principals (45% response rate), Deenihan (2005) found that:
97% of primary principals support mandatory PE at primary level.
92% of primary principals support mandatory PE at junior cycle.
85% of primary principals support mandatory PE at senior cycle.
85% of primary principals support availability of PE as a Leaving Certificate subject.

There is a Leaving Certificate physical education syllabus in development and we should see it completed within a year. And we are beginning to see the status of physical education improve in this country. A study on school provision of post-primary Physical Education in Ireland (MacPhail et al, 2005) also noted strong support of secondary school principals:
85% of post primary principals support mandatory PE at junior cycle.
53% of post primary principals support mandatory PE at senior cycle.
75% of post primary principals support availability of PE as Leaving Certificate subject.

I am not an advocate for mandatory physical education at senior cycle as we are dealing with young adults who need to have input into their own educational programming and needs. However, if they have access to high quality primary and junior cycle PE programmes then we will see the young adults walk with their feet and join physical education programming at the senior level. There are other realities and I am aware of the towering presence of high stakes assessment in the Irish senior level post primary education sector and some incredible deleterious affects it can have, not just on physical education experiences for young people, but on their overall holistic education. This however, is the Irish post primary school reality and we have to work within that reality for now.

The Irish challenge is to build a human and physical infrastructure of collaborative partnerships between professional educators, local and national leisure and sporting agencies, policy makers, and the academic community in the development, evaluation, and dissemination of models of best practices for the Irish context.

A coherent and balanced physical education curriculum

Teachers have responsibilities to provide a coherent and balanced quality physical education programme for every child in our schools. Teachers need to listen to children’s interests and needs relative to physical education. The teacher’s choice of programming for physical education is not the sport or activity the teacher likes to do nor what we did in physical education as children in 1970 or 1980. We need to provide appropriate and relevant physical education experiences for all the young people living in contemporary Ireland.
We need to ensure physical education is inclusive and relevant for all children and we need to connect with and maximise the resources and expertise of the school personnel, the school and our local communities. Sean Gallagher will speak later this morning about the Active School Awards programme showing how wonderfully exciting and balanced physical education programmes can be created and sustained by committed teachers when there are adequate facilities, even if those are shared with or owned with the community. Teachers and parents have a collective responsibility to develop the school ethos that models a healthy and active school for all of the staff and children. The government has the responsibility to ensure an adequate infrastructure to allow them to succeed.

Teachers also have rights related to their physical education curricular responsibilities. They need:
- adequate and safe facility (ie, space) and equipment to teach physical education;
- sufficient time allocated weekly to cover all strands of the curriculum;
- adequate teacher preparation and ongoing continuous professional development in physical education content, teaching methodologies, and assessment to deliver a balanced and coherent quality programme; and
- principal and parental support for the programme to be delivered and valued.

There is an urgent need to market physical education (as distinct from school sport) to parents and help them understand physical education it is not just a chance for children to blow off steam, as important as that may be, but it is a unique educational endeavour equally important to the overall development of their children as is numeracy and literacy.

**International physical education policies**

In recent years, many governments see the modern lifestyle resulting in a number of long-term physical and social costs to society. Some policy makers believe some of these costs can be addressed through coherent and integrated sport, physical education, recreation and health policies. Thus we have seen the growing interest in sport, health and physical activity with policy reports and new initiatives in countries around the world. Ireland can look to other countries’ physical education policies and learn from their efforts and how appropriate they might be for the Irish cultural context.

In the UK, there has been unprecedented investment in sport and physical education. In 2002, the government launched the ‘Physical Education, School Sport, and Club Links Strategy’ (PESSCL) and initially invested over £450m in the initiative. In 2004, a further £519m was allocated for this initiative – a total of almost £1billion. Associated with this initiative is a National Professional Development Programme available free of charge to all primary, secondary and special schools. The programme
comprises a menu of resources including workshops, videos, materials and mentoring, which are delivered locally to support teachers’ professional development. The overall goal of the strategy is quite simple, yet ambitious. It is to increase the percentage of students engaged for at least two hours per week in high quality physical education and school sport within and beyond the curriculum from 25% in 2002 (which was the baseline) to 85% by 2008. Supporting the implementation of this plan are School Sport Partnerships (SSPs). These are groups of schools working together to develop PE and sport opportunities for all young people. A typical partnership consists of a full time partnership development manager (PDM) who co-ordinates the provision of resources, facilities and programming among schools and local clubs. Reporting to the PDM are up to eight part-time School Sport Co-ordinators (SSCos) who are qualified physical education teachers seconded two days a week from the local sport college. They facilitate the provision of two hours of high quality physical education and school sport at their own school and support up to 45 primary and special school link teachers (PLTs) who are provided with 20 days leave from teaching to lead the provision of physical education and school programming in their respective schools and community clubs. The size of this initiative is quite impressive with 30 local education authorities beginning in 2003 and the expectation that all schools be involved by 2008. Further information on this initiative is available from the Youth Sport Trust website at www.youthsporttrust.org.

The New Zealand government has responded to policy fragmentation and lack of coherence around sport and physical activity with the dismantling of three agencies and the establishment of SPARC under the Sport and Recreation New Zealand Act, 2002. This policy decision was taken amid growing concerns that New Zealand was “fast losing its way as a physically active and sporting nation” (Spark, 2006, p.3). The major strategy for getting children active is implemented by SPARC (Sport and Recreation New Zealand). They provide materials and professional development for teachers around three main initiatives. The first was ‘Active Movement’, an initiative targeted at children under five years. ‘Active Schools’ is a programme for primary school children and ‘Sportfit’ has been targeted for secondary students. Government funding provides teaching resources outlining co-curricula and cross-curricula physical activity opportunities for kids throughout the school day. Co-ordinators work with teachers to help them get the most from the Active Schools teaching resources. More recent national initiatives at a national level include ‘Push Play’ and ‘Mission On’ focused on engaging more New Zealand young people in physically active lifestyles (www.sparc.org.nz).

Part of the Australian Government’s ‘Building a Healthy, Active Australia’ initiative includes Active After-school Communities (AASC) programme that provides primary school aged children access to free, structured physical activity programs in the after-school timeslot. Professional development is provided for teachers and volunteers
working with the children (www.ausport.gov.au).

The preceding examples show concerted and integrated policy initiatives by and across various government agencies in different countries to build high quality physical education, sport and recreation pathways for youth.

**Policy and programme initiatives in Ireland**

There have been many positive developments around primary physical education in the Irish system recently. First, the 1999 Primary School Physical Education syllabus is a progressive document and there is evidence of growing awareness by primary teachers of the content of this syllabus. Second, the two-day inservice offered by the DES (Primary Curriculum Support Programme) to all primary teachers was the first of its kind in physical education. The planning and implementation of the in-service was of the highest quality and was very positively received by teachers (Murphy, 2007\(^{10}\)). The Cuiditheoir programme that has provided direct school based support to teachers teaching physical education is a wonderful initiative that has been well received by teachers. This system should be maintained with a significant increase in the size of the cuiditheoirí staff to provide sustained onsite support.

We have growing attention nationally to the contribution of physical education in getting more young people more active more often and at primary level we need to build on the momentum of the 1999 syllabus. Physical education faculty members from the Colleges of Education, who are well represented at this meeting, are also deeply committed to providing a high quality foundation in physical education in the syllabus during pre-service teacher education. However, we will need continuous professional development opportunities for teachers around the strands of the PE curriculum if this momentum is to be sustained. Most children love physical education in schools but we must be careful that we don’t have young people develop negative attitudes to PE and physical activity by what we offer in the name of PE – a curriculum that is overly reliant on competitive team games.

There are challenges – including access to adequate facilities. The INTO survey in 2004 found that 80% of schools in Donegal did not have a PE hall compared to 40% in Dublin. It was not clear what percentage of these schools were less than four room schools. If we have schools with two and three room classrooms which is the structure in several rural areas it is hard to argue that each of these buildings should have a school hall for each building. So we have to come up with some creative structures and policies that allow the co-location of school and community facilities. We have huge variations in the quality of programmes offered across the country with some

\(^{10}\) Contact Dr Murphy at St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra for the results of her doctoral research on this issue.
wonderful examples of top quality programmes in schools, highlighted quite vividly in the Active Schools Awards\textsuperscript{11} programme discussed (see presentation by Sean Gallagher). We do have to educate teachers and seek their commitment to physical education as an equally important subject in the overall education of the children they teach.

**Recommendations**

The following suggestions are made with regard to each school accessing safe and adequate facilities and equipment, and high quality resources.

- While the provision of facilities to primary schools has improved, more forward planning is needed so that new community facilities are built beside schools where feasible.
- Creation of MOA between agencies to allow for the sharing and maintenance of existing facilities across primary and post primary where feasible.
- Planning for the inclusion of a physical education/physical activity facility with all new schools.
- The provision of an annual physical education/sport budget to all primary schools so that equipment can be upgraded and reviewed.
- Commit funding to physical education resources for teachers in support of student learning.

**TIME ALLOCATION FOR PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

In primary school all subjects are not treated equally. I challenge INTO members to consider that the development of a healthy, caring, well balanced child deserves more time, if not equal time, as would be devoted to the development of numeracy and literacy in our primary education system. This would require consideration of the goals of primary schooling and how schools allocate the time available to cover the curricular demands of the primary curriculum. There is research evidence that having children spend more time actively engaged in physical education does not negatively impact academic achievements. A national aspiration should be to have 30 minutes (daily) of quality physical education and activity in every school in Ireland in the primary school with an infrastructure (human and physical) to sustain that. With a commitment to the value of physical education in the education of our children, we can use discretionary time and rethink how much time we spend on other subjects. Colleges of education also need to review how much time they allocate to preparing prospective teachers for teaching physical education in Irish primary schools. They are part of an infrastructure that sends a message to new teachers of the importance of physical education in the education of the young people they teach. This attention will mean more time than currently allocated for physical education while completing teacher preparation to

\textsuperscript{11} See http://www.activeschoolawards.ie for more details.
provide sufficient knowledge and skills so prospective teachers have the confidence and competence to deliver high quality physical education experiences.

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
We need to think more creatively about the provision of continuous professional development for teachers. Perhaps a suite of courses as part of the INTO and cúrsaí Samhraidh programming over a number of years could be available for teachers who wanted to be certified (ie, specialise) in physical education. Might we link the allocation of a sports duty post at the primary school (to be renamed Physical Education Coordinator or Physical Education Director) to those who have specialised in physical education at either pre-service or who have taken the CPD certification route.

PERSONNEL TEACHING PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS
The INTO does not currently support the role of a specialist physical educator in primary schools. I suggest it is time to revisit this policy. There is some irony in the INTO position as more and more in recent years schools have invited into the school non specialise coaches and non certified teachers from National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) under the aegis of ‘complementing the physical education programme’ and getting more children physically active in their specific sport. I applaud National Governing Bodies wanting to be involved in supporting school physical education. In reality however, there is increased outsourcing of PE to some of these agencies with schools substituting a balanced and coherent physical education programme with experiences in competitive team games which is only one element of the physical education domain. There are also examples of parents paying for the child to engage in physical education (ie, swimming lessons) and after school programming (eg, gymnastics lessons). In the first instance, parents should not have to pay to have their children experience the national syllabus. In the second instance, additional lessons after school should not be a substitution for the regular physical education programme.

I would advocate the hiring of a cadre of specialists in primary schools as curricular leaders for physical education programming. This would include PE specialists for larger schools and PE specialists that would be shared across a number of smaller schools. The primary school teaches PE with a curricular specialist available to the teacher to oversee school programming and delivery. They evaluate the role of coaches and outside external agencies in supporting the PE and sport programme and build teacher capacity in the delivering of the curriculum.

European policy on teaching personnel for physical education shows Ireland relatively out of step with many of its neighbours who have much more flexibility in how they deliver physical education in schools. A recent OECD report (Hardman, 2006) surveyed 27 EU states on physical education policy. The findings noted that:
Four of the 27 EU countries (Belgium, Spain, Greece, and Latvia) had specialists only deliver physical education at primary school.

In nineteen countries approved specialist physical education teachers and primary school teachers deliver physical education.

Eight countries (Ireland, France, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Slovakia, Slovenia, Portugal, Italy) had only primary school teachers teaching physical education.

**Concluding thoughts**

The Irish Government and union policies around physical education are important but policy documents are not sufficient. We have had a myriad of such documents around physical activity and sport in recent years but we now need action plans to ensure these policies are implemented. Such action items need to ensure Irish primary schools at a minimum have:

- Adequate indoor facility onsite or safe and sustained access to a local facility for physical education.
- Allocation of time (60 minutes at least per week) to a balanced and coherent physical education programme.
- Teacher capacity developed around physical education including a cadre of physical education specialists across schools. Larger schools allocated a physical education specialist (ie, co-ordinator) who supports the physical education programming and develops the ethos of a physically active school.
- Professional development for physical education to build on the original two day inservice and support teachers’ commitment to develop their physical education knowledge base.
- Cuiditheoirí caseloads decreased so they have time to visit schools and support primary teachers in delivering a quality programme.
- Educate parents, students, and teachers that physical education is part of the education of children and not a break from learning.

Policy makers and teacher union leaders need to think outside the box in considering:

- What kinds of specialist teachers make most sense for the Irish primary school sector?
- With whom and under what circumstances might smaller schools share physical education facilities? What is the smallest size of school where it has its own indoor space for physical education?
- What are the potential roles for non qualified teachers (ie, local coaches and NGB Sport Development Officers) to support and not substitute for the delivery of the physical education school curriculum?

This presentation promotes the view that all young people through their educa-
tional and sport experiences in primary school will be motivated to live physically active and healthy lives and government policies need to be enacted to create and sustain an infrastructure that allows teachers to maximise their students’ potential in physical education to achieve this objective.
References


The aims of Active School Awards 2007 are very similar to the aims as set out by the Education Conference here this weekend. They are:

- To raise awareness of the value and importance of physical education in primary schools.
- To acknowledge the professional contribution of the class teacher as the driving force for physical education activity in the school.
- To make explicit the learning opportunities afforded by PE.

We want to raise awareness of the value and the importance of PE. We want to acknowledge the professional contribution of the class teacher as the driving force for physical education and activity in the school. And rather than saying that we need to take up our arms, I think we need to get behind the schools who are demonstrating very good practice already. This is not a war that needs to commence, as people are doing very good work already. But what we need to do is make explicit what children can learn through PE, what exactly can we assess in PE that no other subject can give us? A crucial point, and this point was made by Professor Mary O’Sullivan this morning, is to generate the support and involvement of the wider school community. “It takes an entire village to raise a child”. In addition to involving the wider school community, it is crucial to acknowledge the creativity, the initiative and the commitment of those school communities towards producing active schools.

The goals of the Active School Awards are in line with the primary school curriculum where every child takes part and every child enjoys it. That is at the core but at the same time that every child learns something and learns something about themselves through PE and through physical activity. There is gender equity and balance and breadth across the six strands of the PE curriculum.
So in a nutshell, an active school can be summarised as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Physical Education Curriculum</th>
<th>Opportunities for Physical Activity</th>
<th>Opportunities for School Sport</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• PSSI CD</td>
<td>• Irish Heart Foundation – Action for Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>• PCSP inservice seminars</td>
<td>• Special Olympics – a place for everyone</td>
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<td>• Buntús programme</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Resources/programmes managed by the National Governing Bodies of Sport</td>
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On the left hand side you have the formal PE programme, the one hour per week that you dedicate to PE. There have been useful resources and teaching aids produced over the years and a fantastic resource is the one that was produced by the Primary Schools Sports Initiative, a CD of lesson plans for every single strand in the PE curriculum, bar aquatics, and that is available in CD format or on the PCSP website – www.pcsp.ie. As well as that, it has built on the work that has been done for two years whereby 27,000 teachers received PE inservice.

The second aspect of an active school is physical activity and there are other very useful resources produced by the Irish Heart Foundation and Special Olympics for schools as well. The Action for Life resource and A place for everyone – so get into it resource provide tremendous ideas for encouraging physical activity.

The third aspect of an active school are the opportunities for school sport. You have an excellent GAA resource being promoted in the lobby area outside; you have the Buntús programmes produced by the Irish Sports Council; you have other initiatives promoted by the National Governing Bodies of sport and already we are beginning to see this is the village that we are talking about. There is more joined up thinking perhaps than we are giving ourselves credit for. In the context of all those initiatives what does the Active School Awards do? It gives schools an opportunity to showcase their PE programmes, to showcase what they are doing in physical activity and also what they are doing in school sport but to have a balanced approach to all three. Where the emphasis is not solely on school sport to the detriment of the other two but that there is a balance across all three aspects and this takes place within the whole school community. So what can schools do? Well they can document the work they are doing during the school year and especially during Active School Week.
You can see here, children putting together a project, but I would emphasise this is not an art competition – they are just using that as a means of expressing what they are doing in PE, physical activity and in sport. This was at the National Finals event. I will just go through the summary of events that made up Active School Awards 2007. They were launched on 14 February by Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin and I think it was very fitting that the launch took place in a primary school – in Star of the Sea Primary School in Sandymount in Dublin. The Minister was more than happy to demonstrate some of the activities in the athletics strand. Active School Week took place between the 20 and 23 March.

This is actually a photograph from the winning school in Laytown where for that week one of their former pupils came in and assisted the teachers with athletic activities on the beach. Their yard is not big enough normally for running any sort of distance and yet they used some of the amenities that were close to them. I am not saying that this is the solution but illustrates some of the ways that schools overcome
the facilities issue. The schools that were invited to the national celebration or the national finals event are as follows:

**School Address**

- **St Patrick’s BNS**
  New Road, Mallow, Co Cork
- **Castleblakeney NS**
  Castleblakeney, Ballinasloe, Co Galway
- **St Joseph’s NS**
  Convent Road, Ballinrobe, Co Mayo
- **Our Lady’s Abbey**
  Adare, Co Limerick
- **Lumcloon NS**
  Lumcloon, Cloghan, Birr, Co Offaly
- **Scoil an Spioraid Naomh**
  Laytown, Co Meath
- **Scoil Triest**
  Lota, Glanmire, Co Cork
- **St Christopher’s**
  Battery Road, Longford

The last two schools on that list Scoil Triest in Cork and St Christopher’s in Longford are special schools who attend the primary school domain for inservice. They do absolutely brilliant work in the use of PE within every subject to promote the physical literacy of all the children in their school and this then contributes to their general well-being.

You may even have read in the aftermath of the National Finals a piece by Eugene Magee where he stated his honour at being able to see the great work that was being done in schools at the National Finals event.

The National Finals event was held on 4 May and there were 265 students in attendance as well as their teachers. The primary school pupils put all the work they do during the year on a project together. I would state that the challenge for the adjudicating committee was to ascertain what exactly is going on in the schools or are they putting it down on paper? All of these schools used a variety of media to show what they put down on paper is what they are doing in practice and there were some fantastic video diaries and DVD diaries showing the physical activity, the PE and the sport going on in their schools. As well at that we also wanted to show the lifelong link with PE and we made a link with Dr Catherine Woods and her sports science students in DCU – I think it was their 3rd year students. They took every primary school child who was present at the finals to their gym in DCU and put on an array of physical activity and physical games for children to experience. Again the emphasis is on the physical. We also made use of some high profile sports science or PE teachers at the national event so you have Paul Casey, the Dublin footballer, who came along and helped. You had Sarah Jane Belton who is a PE lecturer and also happens to be captain of the Irish ladies rugby team, and Gillian O’Sullivan, one of two Irish women to have a medal from the world athletics championship – Sonia O’Sullivan being the other.

In the winning school in Laytown, Co Meath, there is not one teacher; it’s the school
staff, it is a collective effort because they made a conscious effort that what they are doing in PE, physical activity and sport has to involve the entire school staff. The formal presentation of the cheque was a very humbling moment for me because I went to the school to be faced by 400 children with Active School Awards t-shirts on them and all of them clearly able to demonstrate that what they showed in their project was what they were doing in practice.

Getting back to the idea of “it takes a village to raise a child”, there was a village behind the Laytown project. These are the people who supported the teachers – the teachers are still there but there were a variety of people also there from sporting organisations and from various professions like the airport police who came in and did a few self defence activities with the children just to show them that all of this is physical activity. It gave a great sense of unity in that school in question.

The brochure for Active School Awards will be revamped and will go to all schools in a matter of two months. I urge all schools to row in behind the great practice that those schools who have entered already are doing and just see how fulfilling it can be in your PE programme, your physical activity and your school sport.

So in conclusion, what we wanted to show and what we think we are showing, is that the Active School Awards, when a school is working together with all the organisations that are out there working for school PE, can showcase the great work that is being done in schools, provide a PE programme for all pupils with opportunities for physical activity and school sport. There is a tremendous recognition of the professional contribution of the class teacher and everything else then is in support of the class teacher, not replacing the class teacher. Schools, through a variety of media, can make explicit the learning opportunities afforded by PE.

A crucial point, and a point I have made on a few occasions at this stage, is the importance of the support and involvement of the wider school community, it won’t take place in isolation. We have to recognise the creativity, the initiative, the commitment of those school communities to the promotion of a physically educated school population and to bring all those personnel together – not to exclude anyone – but yet to have firm policies as to the role of each to the benefit of the children in the school.

The Active School Awards initiative for 2007/2008 will go ahead. We have a website www.activeschoolawards.ie. Michael Quealy spoke this morning and he will be co-ordinating it. What we have done over the course of the last year is put up indicators of good practice. What have those schools done in the past? What have they done that distinguishes them from other schools? Every dance that is listed in the PE curriculum is demonstrated in video format on the website, thanks to PCSP Cuiditheoir Ita Seoighe for producing them – as well other short little clips so that you can see that this is perhaps how I might teach it.

We also have athletics tips on some of the skills and how to teach them and that bank of resources will grow. So it is not just the initiative, it is also providing opportu-
nities for teachers to dip into it and to be of assistance to them. So on that note I would like to thank you for your attention and I look forward to seeing even more entries to the Active Schools Awards 2007/2008 and effectively use all of the support services that are available for PE and school sports.
ACTIVE SCHOOL AWARDS IN PRACTICE

Mary Immaculate Girls’ National School, Collooney, Sligo

Ellen
Good afternoon everyone, I hope you are all having a lovely time in Sligo. My name is Ellen O’Grady.

Aoife
I’m Aoife Walsh. We are both in Fourth Class, and we go to Mary Immaculate GNS. Last year we did a project with our teacher Ms Foley and we were the county winners for Sligo in Active School Awards.

Ellen
Active Schools Week is a super week. We revised all the activities that we learned in PE. Our school yard is small and we have no gym, but we still had lots of fun.

On Monday, we did outdoor and adventure activities. We all wanted to do horse-riding, so the local horse riding instructors from Markree Castle brought the horses to our school. It was fantastic. The teachers went on the horses too.

Junior and Senior Infants did orienteering in the yard. Everyone did team challenges. In the afternoon, we went on a forest trail. Some of our parents came too. Union wood is beautiful and you can see it from the dual carriageway at Collooney.

Aoife
We play lots of games such as tag rugby, basketball, Olympic handball, camogie, and Gaelic football. On Tuesday, we had a games day. We did co-operative games and parachute games in the morning. Our GAA coach did camogie skills. Some of the school’s past pupils who are on the Sligo Ladies team visited the school. We dressed up in the Sligo colours. Watch out Kerry, we want the Sam Maguire cup next!

Ellen
On Wednesday we did athletics. We learned how to throw the javelin. The whole school did a skipathon. We also had fun races. One of our teachers won the potato and spoon race. We gave her a head start.

Thursday was dance day! We were exhausted after our céili dancing. Bhí an-spórt againn.

Friday was for gymnastics. We love gymnastics but we have to do it in our local hall. PCSP made a video of us two years ago doing our gymnastics. Here is a short video clip of it.
**Aoife**

We also do aquatics on Friday afternoons in Sligo Sports Complex. We also participate in Cumann na mBunscol. Our parents help out with these activities.

Active School Week was an enjoyable week and everybody participated, the pupils, the staff of the school, and our parents. It was a busy week.

Our motto now for PE is called the 3 F’s – Fun, Friends, and Fair Play.

We try to have fun, we get on better as friends when involved in sport, we learn how to play fairly and follow rules.

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**Ellen**

We would like to say a special thank you to all of you for listening to our presentation. Thank you to the INTO for inviting us here today. Thank you to the organisers of Active School Week.

Have a lovely time in Sligo.
I was sitting in the lobby this morning and two individuals who knew me from the past came up to me. One was the same vintage as myself in St Macartan’s College in Monaghan. I was a middle distance runner and a Gaelic football player in secondary school and he said to me “you are the idiot who used to run around the field every day at lunchtime”. I later went back to teach PE in St Macartan’s. Half an hour later I met another guy and he said, “you were the idiot who used to make me run around the field every day at lunchtime”. So you see, I just can’t win.

I am going to talk about PE and wellness and the question that one has to ask is: why physical education? Why do these kids need physical education? There are a number of reasons. They are well documented and include physical, lifestyle, affective, social and cognitive development. However, I want to focus on the role of physical education in physical and lifestyle development. We want our children to grow up to be healthy and to have an excellent ‘quality of life’. But unfortunately that is increasingly less likely to happen. We have an enormous burden of chronic disease that is going to afflict the current generation of children at a much earlier age, and I think that your PE programmes will play an important role in helping to delay the onset of many of these chronic diseases.

This is where we used to live.

These are our ancestors who lived in caves 10,000 years ago. These people had to hunt and gather for their food. Now think about it, if you had to hunt for your food it meant that you had to be physically active, and only those who were able to hunt and gather survived. So basically we have inherited their genes and these genes require
regular physical activity. If we don’t get regular physical activity our body maladapts and we develop chronic diseases.

We hear a lot about overweight and obesity in the media. I am sure that as you look at a four to 12 year old in your classroom, the last thing on your mind is going to be cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, hypertension, renal disease, and osteoporosis. But unfortunately these are diseases with which you are going to have to familiarise yourselves. For example, a child who is overweight and obese will be at an increased risk for premature cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

Look at the development of chronic diseases and here we have age on the x axis – from birth to death. Each chronic disease is characterised by a number of distinct phases. The longest phase is termed the sub-clinical phase, and it is during this phase that the disease develops. Right now every single person in this room has probably one of more risk factors for heart disease. These include high levels of bad cholesterol and low levels of good cholesterol, high blood pressure, age, family history, gender, inactivity and obesity. A large number of children in our primary schools also have many of these risk factors.

The next phase of disease progression is when an individual crosses a clinical horizon to manifest with clinical symptoms of the disease. For example, we may get shortness of breath or chest pain when we exercise. The disease then progresses to where there are severe symptoms and then eventually death. I want you to remember these phases, and in particular the sub-clinical phase. Our grandparents probably crossed this clinical horizon to manifest with symptoms of disease probably in their 50s and 60s and they only lived 10 to 15 years of their life in a state of ill health or morbidity. Unfortunately, the graph is being pushed to the left. In fact, I believe that a large percentage of the current generation of children will cross this clinical horizon.
much earlier in life than their grandparents.

We have children today who are being diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Many of these children may develop peripheral neuropathies and retinopathies in their late teens and early twenties. Foot and lower leg amputations, blindness, renal failure and premature heart disease are just a few of the likely consequences of these peripheral neuropathies and retinopathies. Because many individuals will cross this clinical horizon much earlier in life it is likely that they will live a large part of their life in a state of ill health. What we want to do is to push the graph in the opposite direction so that they remain healthy and have a good quality of life for as long as they possibly can.

One of the problems is that we engineering physical activity out of lives. In the last 50 years all of these modern devices have come on the market.

I grew up in a small village in Monaghan and believe it or not I had to go up to the pump to get water to bring it down to the house. But look at all these modern devices. Even people who go to exercise choose to take an escalator (slide) rather than walk up a few steps. We just don’t want to exercise any more.
In addition to a decrease in levels of physical activity, our diet has also changed dramatically in recent years. Ideally a child (or adult) should consume the same number of calories that they expend per day, but unfortunately that is not the way it is. Our waist lines are expanding rapidly. Let me give you two examples. When McDonald’s opened in the 1950s a regular size fries contained 200 calories. In 1970 they introduced a ‘large’ which contained 320 calories. In the 1980s they introduced a new ‘large’ which contained 400 calories and the old large became the medium. In the early 1990s they introduced another new large, which contained 450 calories. Then in the late 1990s they introduced the supersize. Today, a supersize fries contains 610 calories and a large size fries contains 540 calories. Remember the original large size contained 320 calories. When McDonald’s opened for business in the 1950s a burger, fries and 12 oz coke contained 590 calories. What child walks into McDonalds and asks for a regular burger, regular fries and a 12oz coke? Instead the standard order is normally a quarter pound cheeseburger, super fries and supersize coke, which contains a total of 1,550 calories. This is an enormous number of calories for a child.

Many children are being exposed to risk factors much earlier than their grandparents or even their parents.
This is a cartoon. Basically a boy comes to the house and says to the guys mum “Can Johnnie come out and eat”. It used to be, can Johnnie come out to play? The times have certainly changed!

Professor Frank Booth is a prominent molecular geneticist in the US and he stated a few years ago that “with the possible exception of diet we know of no single intervention with greater promise than physical activity to reduce the risk of virtually all chronic diseases simultaneously”. You rarely see someone walking into a doctor’s office who is physically fit and aerobically trained having risk factors for multiple diseases.

Why the need for physical education? Let’s look at bone health. Approximately 50% of women over 50 years of age will have an osteoporotic fracture in her remaining lifetime. Many women have low bone mineral mass which actually places them at increased risk for an osteoporotic fracture. Furthermore, a women’s risk of a hip fracture is equal to or greater than the combined risk of breast, uterine or ovarian cancer. But the really startling statistic is that 20% of hip fracture patients will die in the year after the fracture and that greater than 50% of women who survive a hip fracture will not be able to walk or move about easily. Why do I emphasise these facts? When does bone develop? The greatest rate of bone development occurs between 0 and 20 years of age. That is the time period when young girls have the potential to lay down the same amount of bone mineral that they will lose at menopause. An appropriate physical activity programme coupled with adequate calcium intake will help to insure that young girls maximise their bone mineral deposition. In doing do, many of the problems in later life will be alleviated and their quality of life will also improve substantially.

What about these three young boys? Which of them will develop heart disease? One of them will definitely die from heart disease, and perhaps two. When I talk about heart disease or cardiovascular disease I am talking about a brain attack, which is a stroke or a heart attack, which is the heart. Each year there are 3,000 strokes and 8,000
heart attacks in Ireland. Unfortunately, for 46% of women and 62% of men the first sign that they have heart disease is a heart attack or sudden death. Why? Because we all have risk factors and some form of sub clinical cardiovascular disease, and we don’t know it. We have learned an enormous amount about cardiovascular disease over the last 15 to 20 years.

These are your coronary arteries and they look like pipes. It was believed that the build up (over a number of years) of plaque in the middle of the blood vessels was responsible for the development of heart disease and the occurrence of a heart attack. We now know that plaque builds up in the walls and not in the middle of our arteries. If the plaque ruptures a clot will develop in your artery and that is what causes the majority of heart attacks. The earlier you are exposed to a risk factor the greater the chance of developing a vulnerable plaque that will rupture.

The long pre-clinical phase and associated pathological changes of cardiovascular disease occurs in the arteries of children well before clinical manifestations such as angina or a heart attack. At this moment it is likely that many Irish children who have multiple risk factors have evidence of atherosclerotic lesions in the wall of the blood vessels supplying the heart (coronary arteries). Prolonged exposure to risk factors is a major problem. What are these risk factors? A family history of heart disease is one. If you have a male first-degree relative who died from sudden cardiac death before the age of 55 or a female first-degree relative who died before 65 you are at increased risk. Another risk factor is male gender. Others include, cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, high levels of bad cholesterol and low levels of good cholesterol, high blood sugar which predisposes individuals to diabetes, obesity and sedentary lifestyle.

The point I want to make, is that if you are sedentary, the likelihood is that you will be obese, you will have high levels of blood sugar you will have high levels of bad cholesterol and low levels of good cholesterol, you will have high blood pressure and probably smoke. That is the reality. Cigarette smoking is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease. The media tell us that it is flashy to smoke. However, the reality is
This is an individual addicted to nicotine who actually put a cigarette to his tracheotomy so he could actually get a nicotine fix.

How do we assess heart disease in children? We can evaluate risk factors, such as cholesterol and whether they exercise. However, knowledge of risk factors is important in identifying those individuals at increased risk for developing cardiovascular disease, but they do not tell us if someone has cardiovascular disease. We can do a simple ultrasound test to assess for the presence of cardiovascular disease. An ultrasound probe is placed against the carotid artery in the neck and a measurement is made of the width of the intima and media layer of the blood vessel. There are numerous studies in the literature that have tracked the width of the intima and media layer of the carotid artery from four years of age, through puberty and into their twenties and thirties. Individuals with risk factors such as high levels of cholesterol, who are overweight or are inactive during their primary school years have greater carotid intima and media layer thickness earlier than those who are normal weight, have normal cholesterol and are physically active.

The one message I want you all to take home today is that aerobic fitness is one of the best predictors of how healthy you are and how long you are going to live. It is probably the most important of all of the risk factors.

My colleagues and I in DCU undertook a study in a group of 5,000 Irish 15-17 year old boys and girls. We measured their aerobic fitness using a shuttle run test. The normal weight boys completed 77 laps, the overweight 68 laps and the obese boys 42 laps. What was really alarming and Mary alluded to it this morning, was the poor fitness levels of young girls (42 laps for the normal weight, the overweight 32 laps and the obese 22 laps). If the best predictor of how healthy you are and how long you are going to live is your aerobic fitness then the current fitness levels of young girls in our country is appalling and needs our immediate attention.

Obesity is an insidious disease. We can classify people as normal weight, overweight or obese based on their BMI. This is determined by dividing height in metres squared
by body weight in kilograms. Normal BMI is classified as 18-24.9, overweight 25-29.9 and obese >30. If you are overweight or obese, your risk for developing hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular disease increases. There are age and height specific tables for children. Normally, if a child is above the 95th percentile for their height and weight they are classified as overweight.

The highest levels of obesity in the US are in Jefferson County, Mississippi. Almost three out of every 10 adults in Jefferson County are classified as being obese. The point I want to make is that people in Jefferson County didn’t wake up one morning in 2006 and say “Holy Moses, I am obese, How did this happen?” It is an insidious disease that occurs over a long period of time. The United States have actually tracked this over a number of years. This is the data for 1992 for each State in the US. The darker the colour the greater the level of obesity.

Now let’s look at the map for each year up to 2006. You will notice that the graph gets progressively darker. Once you become obese there is an increased likelihood that you will remain obese for the rest of your life. The only way to arrest the epidemic of obesity is to stop it in the first place. There is no drug or diet that will work long term. Worse still, those who are overweight and obese and lose their weight have to expend more calories and exercise per day to maintain their weight loss than somebody who was never obese in the first place. The dice is loaded against them!
Obesity in children is increasing in prevalence. There is no defined cure and there is a high relapse rate and limited remission. In addition, obesity in children is associated with both physical and emotional co-morbidities and negatively impacts on the quality of life and continues all the way into adulthood. Currently 22% of 15-17 year old Irish children are overweight or obese. The number is similar in both boys and girls, and the percentage of overweight Irish adolescents is almost identical to the figures in the US.

This is the car of the future. It is lower to the ground, it has two doors that open outwards, the seat is low, and wide to accommodate obese individuals. In a similar way the size of wheelchairs and blood pressure cuffs are also increasing. We are desensitising society to obesity. It is becoming the norm!

The metabolic syndrome is a metabolic derangement. You are classified as having the metabolic syndrome if you have three of the following five risk factors – a large waist circumference, high levels of triglycerides which indicate you eat a high fat meal, low levels of good cholesterol, elevated blood pressure or elevated fasting glucose.

In a study involving 2,500 children in the US, 29% of overweight children have the metabolic syndrome. We found that 21% of 15-17 year old Irish school children have
the metabolic syndrome. If you look at the American data and the Irish data, they are super-imposable.

Many of these children with the metabolic syndrome have glucose intolerance and are pre-diabetic. This is an illustration of some of the medical consequences of diabetes.

Many of the children with the metabolic syndrome will develop diabetes and may lose their sight or part of a limb, may develop kidney failure and die prematurely. Those who live will have a poor quality of life. Unfortunately, that is the reality. All of the problems are not in the future. Many obese children currently have acute medical problems such as gallstones, orthopaedic problems, sleeping disorders, allergic asthma, polycystic ovarian syndrome, dyslipidemia, reproductive cancers, and a poor quality of life.

Finally, there are many examples of behaviours that originate in childhood that lead to chronic health conditions. We know that approximately 40% of individuals who start to drink before the age of 14 will develop a dependence on alcohol whereas only 10% of those who start to drink after 20 will develop a dependency. If you look at
smoking, 82% of current smokers start smoking before the age of 18 and virtually no adult smoker starts after the age of 25. If you are obese between the ages of 15 and 17, you are 18 times more likely to be obese than an individual who was obese before the age of two. Once you’re obese as a teenager the likelihood is that you are going to be obese as an adult.

Primary prevention is stopping a disease before it manifests. Secondary prevention is treating someone who has a disease. We have to start with children and we have to focus on primary prevention. There is an important role for primary school physical education. I have to admit that I admire primary school teachers. I honestly don’t know how you guys fit everything in to your schedule. Every national governing body and every health agency thinks the primary school PE teacher will solve the future health problems of the nation. In truth, the PE teacher simple cannot be expected to be main instrument of primary prevention in Ireland. As Mary alluded to this morning, you are part of a village. There is no doubt that the primary school PE teacher can play an important role in promoting health. My task this morning was to impress upon you the importance of that role from a health and wellness perspective. Lifestyle changes and particularly physical inactivity is having a significant impact on the rate of progression of chronic disease in children. Many of you will probably be around to see the devastating medical and social consequences of these debilitating diseases.

Thank you.
INTRODUCTION

All delegates to the conference were allocated to discussion groups to consider the issues raised in the background report on *PE in the Primary School* and those raised in the presentations. The discussion groups were facilitated by members of the INTO Education Committee. The reports of the discussions were collated and are presented below. The theme of the question is in italics, followed by a synopsis of the discussion from the various groups under each theme.

**The generalist PE teacher v the specialist PE teacher**

The discussion groups generally were of the view that the generalist PE teacher was the ideal but with help from a specialist in certain areas of the PE curriculum. The generalist teacher however, needs more support. It was recommended that the colleges of education should train teachers properly initially so that teachers would be confident and competent in teaching PE. Confidence levels vary from teacher to teacher and some teachers who are very confident could swap classes with other teachers for PE. Small schools may suffer in this regard however, as they would have less flexibility when it comes to swapping. It was also noted that some small rural schools have excellent PE programmes while others are not so good due to the confidence, ability or willingness of teachers to take PE. Attitude to PE rather than aptitude was seen to be an important factor in progressing the teaching of the PE curriculum.

The PE specialist has already appeared in our primary schools. The PE cuiditheoir service from the PCSP was cited as an example of specialisation already existent. Teachers were very positive generally towards this service and some called for its extension and also wished to see a more structured, more easily accessible PE cuiditheoir service. The PCSP website was praised as a valuable resource and some teachers wanted it noted that the PE inservice training days had been “very good”.

Specialist coaches are already coaching in primary schools in GAA, rugby, soccer and gymnastics, for example, and are an important part of the PE programme, in that they bring expertise and equipment both of which may be in short supply in school. Specialists in primary school may be necessary in areas like gymnastics, aquatics,
dance and music. A PE specialist could be shared between small rural schools or be a Director of PE in large schools. Specialists may also be needed to train teachers in areas like gymnastics and dance. They could also have a role in modelling and demonstrating PE classes for teachers. Specialisation of a type is happening in large schools where teachers collaborate and specialise in certain strands of the PE curriculum.

A specialist teacher would give PE a status that it doesn’t have at present. It was also noted that specialists in gymnastics would be useful because it can be difficult to teach and dangerous. There may also be concerns around health and safety. Gymnastics at floor level and performed on gymnastic mats was considered quite safe, though it was thought that a certain degree of expertise was required. Gymnastics on apparatus is more challenging and may require spotting or assistance from a specialist teacher or coach. A specialist PE teacher would be a great help especially in gymnastics which was perceived by some delegates as difficult and dangerous.

**Coaching from Sports Bodies**

Most schools availed themselves of coaching from national bodies like the GAA, FAI, Basketball Association, IRFU and Irish Sports Council (Buntús). The quality of outside coaches needs to be considered carefully. The class teacher should dictate the programme content and there could be health and safety issues. However, a specialist outside coach is a great help. Teachers expressed the view that they should be entitled to get help from any external body suitable to be involved in school life. Coaching by outside experts is seen as an important part of the PE programme, as they bring expertise and equipment, both of which may be in short supply in the school. It was felt by some people that coaches who visit schools are only interested in games and preparing people for these games, though the majority felt that the GAA and rugby coaches do fantastic work. The coaches are enthusiastic about sport and encourage students to be active outside of school hours also.

The presence of the local GAA club was held to be a healthy one for the local school and should be encouraged. Outside coaches should not replace the existing PE programme, but complement it. One school used the coaches to coach the teachers in the skills of the various games. Most teachers had heard of the Irish Sports Council, the sports partnerships, and the Buntús bags. Some commented that the contents of the senior bag were poor but the activity cards and the half-day training were good. Most agreed that there were more resources available to schools at present but dissemination and implementation strategies were fragmented and haphazard at best.

**Professional Development**

Teachers generally admitted that they were more likely to teach things that they were
comfortable with to the exclusion of aspects of the programme with which they were not as comfortable, which could lead to the PE programme being incomplete. It was also stated that for the most part teachers can teach the curriculum but schools may have equipment gathering dust where teachers may not know how to use it. There was a view that poor teacher-attitudes towards PE was caused by the pressure to cover other subject areas of the curriculum. Teachers can teach PE if they receive proper inservice and if the will is there. Delegates also asked for more PE courses to be made available locally. The PCSP CD on PE was seen as an excellent resource. The PCSP cuiditheoirí were also praised for their helpfulness and willingness to share ideas.

Games

Games were commented on by a few groups. It was generally felt that many schools are over reliant on games as part of PE and that teachers should move away from this and try to cover all areas of the curriculum. The comment was also made that games, team games particularly, may turn girls off PE, though basketball for instance was considered a game where girls could excel even when competing with boys. School teams often make Gods out of some children – only 15 can play, all others are ignored. Some delegates were of the view that girls take to small sided 4/5/6 aside games just as well as boys do. They are often less egocentric and appear to grasp the intricacies of team play much more readily than some boys do.

Some teachers were of the view that competitive games should not take place in schools. There was a also a view that inter-school games should not take place during school time, but that teachers should be paid to take teams after school. The point was also made that inter-school competitions should involve mini blitzes with 5/7 aside teams and each school could field an A, B and C team or Red/Yellow and Blue teams of mixed ability or streamed and this would give all children a chance to play. It was noted that the GAA has been trying to kick-start a system in each county under the games banner with small-sided games, adapted rules and where everyone plays. Some delegates commented on the need for pupils’ attitudes to change also, as it can’t be soccer all the time.

School policies

Some delegates were of the view that there were parents who did not believe PE as a subject was as important as other curricular areas. Other views expressed were that a school’s policy should state in what circumstances pupils could opt out. Opting out in some cases should be treated as a sensitive issue as children may be body conscious about their weight or be unable to run. Many children opt out of aquatics. Children would not be encouraged to opt out of certain English, Gaeilge or Maths strands
although tin whistle playing was quoted as another opt-out area. However, another view expressed was that children cannot be forced to participate, but that teachers can be good role models and encourage them to participate. It was felt that there should be early intervention in physical literacy similar to English or mathematics literacy – this was a new concept for many but there was general agreement with the idea. Delegates were of the opinion that infants should have a greater length of PE time to focus on fundamental skills, and that a multiplicity of skills should be developed including both fine and gross motor skills.

**Assessment**

Teacher observation is probably the most widely-used form of PE assessment. Participation, fun, and enjoyment of PE were considered to be important areas to assess. There was general agreement that assessment should be reported to parents by teachers. There was also a view that teachers should begin by assessing themselves and by talking through the child’s experience of PE as a whole, instead of just ticking boxes, as PE was supposed to be about fun and enjoyment and personal well-being. If the short amount of time (60 minutes) allocated to PE per week is taken into account, assessment should not take up too much teaching time. Some delegates felt that assessment could be done at the end of a strand and could relate to curriculum objectives. There was also a view that the class teacher could assess pupils’ fine and gross motor skills – these could signal visual or dyspraxia problems; for example, a pupil could have difficulty crawling. There was support for the idea that each child should be ‘motorically’ competent. The issue of self-assessment was also discussed; for example, how does the child feel about their PE ability? It was felt to be a truly public arena for the child, and perhaps the first they encounter. Self-assessment by the child could focus on issues such as “did I participate well?” If a child is struggling in literacy or other subjects it may not be immediately obvious to his/her peers, whereas, lack of ability in PE is instantly obvious. If a child is having difficulty in PE, it is important to combat this and work on the child’s self-esteem from early on, to foster positive attitudes to PE and, it is hoped, to eliminate drop-out rates later.

Assessment in PE allows for the inclusion of the area of self-discipline and co-operation with others. Assessment also provides opportunities for staff to share feedback at the beginning or end of the school year.

Some delegates felt that too much was expected of pupils – Olympic standards in some cases. Too much assessment in PE would damage the fun/enjoyment aspect of physical education. It was agreed however, that schools should be encouraged to assess what strands are being taught in the school.
Time for PE

Delegates stated that time spent teaching PE depended on the time available, the teacher and the weather. Teachers were very enthusiastic following the PE inservice but curriculum overload, when they returned to school, prevented them from implementing PE to its fullest extent. There was a view that one hour of PE and one hour integrating PE with other subjects would be enough time. There was one suggestion that Irish time could be cut back. It was also considered important to educate parents on the benefits to their children of PE.

Delegates felt that swimming took up too much time and children also have to pay for it, but the vast majority of delegates said their schools engaged in swimming. In a few schools teachers went into school before normal starting time or stayed after normal closing time to take children swimming outside of normal school hours. Delegates pointed out that apart from formal PE lessons many teachers gave up lunch breaks and in some cases time after school to coach children in football, athletics and other games.

Community links

It was stated that the use of community facilities by schools would only work if they were within walking distance as the cost of transport on a regular basis would be prohibitive. Permission, cancellations, insurance and the use of halls by, for example, drama groups were all seen as possible stumbling blocks to the smooth running of school usage of community facilities. Time was also considered a huge factor. It was felt that schools don’t generally use community facilities. Delegates commented that the GAA had very good facilities nationwide. It was stated that communities must be aware of their responsibilities to their young people and that facilities should be available after school and during holidays and that swimming pools and community halls must be provided.

Aquatics

The difficulties in implementing the aquatics strand are self evident and were consistent across everyone’s experience. Among the difficulties cited were: proximity of the pool to the school; costs of transport; cost of lessons; the hire of the pool and swimming teacher; time; child protection issues; health and safety issues, and gender issues regarding teachers and pupils in dressing rooms. Vetting of swimming coaches also arose as an issue. The point was made that the school was at the mercy of the swimming coach who may or may not coach in accordance with the aquatics programme. One group stated that it was the only curricular area where schools were allowed to levy a charge, although many schools charge for gymnastics, dance and music also.
The time when the aquatics programme was implemented also varied. Some schools stay on after school one evening a week to have swimming lessons although this did not meet with broad approval. Some delegates felt aquatics should be outside the curricular PE programme altogether. Others felt it was a vital and very important life skill and if it was not taught during school hours some children would never learn this skill. One delegate described a model where the parents ran a swimming club after school, running and staffing it themselves, totally removing it from the school day. Most schools had some model of implementing aquatics on a termly basis for class groupings. Smaller schools sometimes choose the last term to go swimming when younger pupils were more confident and mature. Some schools decide not to take infants at all; other schools do swimming with only a junior, middle and senior class in any particular year. Some felt aquatics should be taught at one class level only, though it was noted that if a pupil was ill that year s/he never learned the skill. There was general agreement that no opt out of swimming should be allowed, although in reality this was difficult to implement if the excuse was valid.

Regarding personnel, most administrative principals went to all aquatics sessions as an extra adult. Many schools also use parents to assist and to help younger pupils get dressed, undressed and dry hair. The issue of both parents working has limited the option of using parents. The issue of gender causes problems, as it was impossible for a female teacher to attend to boys in the male-only dressing room and male teachers could not directly attend to female pupils in female dressing rooms. It was strongly felt that every male teacher should have an adult female attending aquatics sessions if he were bringing female pupils to a swimming pool. The issue of parents attending, while solving some problems, raised others, such as vetting and suitability. Overall, however, teachers did feel that aquatics was an important part of the PE curriculum and should be implemented where possible. However, the following recommendations were suggested:

- DES should fund aquatics properly and the INTO should campaign for this. Parents would support this campaign, it was felt, if they were asked to get involved.
- INTO should campaign on PE funding.
- A Congress motion should be tabled on PE.
- The use of the school bus service to take pupils to pools should be implemented.
- Parents should be used more to assist – especially with aquatics.
- The INTO should campaign for resources for the community.
- Every class should not have to do aquatics every year.

Physically active children = healthier and happier children and better learners?
There wasn’t unanimous agreement in relation to this issue. There were comments that the body benefits from physical activity, and that generally children become healthier and happier, but that some children hate PE. Girls may be turned off – especially if games are the only element of the PE programme implemented. Lack of facilities may also be a problem.

Environment was also considered very important – proper breakfast, family background, and living near masts were factors. A lot of classrooms were too small to encourage healthy minds let alone healthy bodies. Time or lack of it, due to an overloaded curriculum, can be a factor in encouraging children to be more physically active. Famous sports personalities could be invited to the classroom to motivate children and children should be encouraged to create their own games.
A plenary session took place following the discussion groups, where delegates had an opportunity to put questions to the panel. Below is an edited version of the discussion. Questions and comments from delegates are outlined in blue. Responses from the panel to the questions and comments then follow. The panel members were Professor Niall Moyna, DCU, Professor Mary O’Sullivan, UL, Sean Gallagher, PCSP, Michael Quealy, PCSP, Michael Weed, Education Committee, and Deirbhile Nic Craith, Senior Official. Milo Walsh, leaschathaoirleach of the Education Committee chaired the session.

Just before I start I want to say that the two young girls were fantastic, brilliant. I wish I was able to speak with such facility. This is a general question to the whole panel. Quite a lot of the discussion this morning has been about resources, about there not being enough space for PE teachers and schools being too small, or not having integrated into their communities because there’s no room where PE can be done. It seems to me that, maybe, it is time for small schools to be amalgamated into larger district units where you would have the resources, a specialist PE teacher and a specialist room. What does the panel think?

I would like to address the funding issue. In 2002, the Minister cut the PE equipment grant to our schools. In 2003, it was McDonald’s restaurants who funded the GAA Catch and Kick scheme in our schools. In 92% of Irish primary schools footballs arrived out with McDonald’s logo on them. In 2005, Tesco hired Ronan O’Gara to front their sports for schools scheme. In 2006, Ray Darcy and Sonia O’Sullivan had us collecting vouchers – it cost €4,000 to get a Gaelic football or €70,000 to get a basketball skills kit. I would like to know how do the panel feel we should respond to these commercial initiatives that are inequitable towards small schools, poor schools and schools that don’t have a Tesco store near them. Last year Supervalu processed €150,000,000 worth of shopping receipts through our schools in ten weeks while the government refused to give us PE equipment grants. Unfortunately, many of us are complicit in allowing the government to get away with this underfunding because we will collect these tokens and prolong these efforts.

This question is directed at Mary O’Sullivan. Regarding after school activities in Australia and children being active every day, I was wondering who runs those activities and who funds them? From the discussion groups that I have been in, every teacher seems to be doing the hour and even using their discretionary time within
school but to get children more active, maybe the government should be providing after school activities as well.

This is more a comment than a question. The two sides of children’s health are their level of activity and their intake of calories. You spoke about McDonald’s but what I want to say is that it is not all about what they eat in McDonald’s on Saturday. As a teacher with many years experience, I notice having banned Mars bars and crisps and whatever from lunches and gone into healthy eating, the children are now coming to school with two yoghurts, with cream crackers and bread and whatever, and supersizing wouldn’t describe the lunches they have. I wonder is this the case in other schools or is it just middleclass?

Mary O’Sullivan, UL

In the two examples that I used, one in Australia and one in New Zealand, both are funded by the government. It is a collaboration between the education and the sporting agencies, who have responsibility for it. But it is also a mixture of professional and volunteer work. We are not going to get rid of volunteers, nor do I want to, because the volunteers are an incredibly important part of the physical activity community. So in that case, the government and departments in both of those countries fund the resources, the packs, the activities, the schedules and the pieces of equipment and then teachers are provided with professional development. The people who are providing the professional development are funded. I can’t remember the details of whether or not there is a specific amount of money that is given to the school and they decide how to use it. In terms of supervision by the teacher, some of that is voluntary and some of it is paid. With regard to the other question that was raised relative to resources, I think the issue was “are schools too small”. You want to talk about opening a can of worms! Ideologically we have a position in this country – there are lots of advantages to small schools and we have the intimacy of a small school, but also you gain something on the swings and you lose something on the roundabouts. We have small schools, and we have a lot of things going for us. But we also have the disadvantage of not being able to offer some things in small schools. That is a bigger ideological debate for me on this particular morning, but I think it is a nice example of how one particular piece of a policy generates into a discussion about much broader issues and which has resonance across a number of issues.

Michael Weed, Education Committee

I think commercialisation does place schools in a dilemma; it has done for a number of years now. We, in the INTO, have guidelines but schools will still make their own decisions on what they wish to do. My own point of view is that the quality of a lot of the equipment left an awful lot to be desired and in some cases could be dangerous to use. And small schools again did find themselves in the position where they couldn’t collect
enough tokens. I think in some schemes if you collected one token in small schools you got double or there was something like that. I don’t have an answer to it at the moment because schools will still make their own decisions but it is not something that I encourage. If we were getting proper funding we wouldn’t be in this position anyway.

I had better ask this question before I die, I am not sure how much time I have left! I was looking at that car of the future – I don’t think low to the ground is a good idea if you are an obese person because then you can’t get out of it, you would have to be craned out but never mind…… The PCSP delivery of the inservice days was done, to the best of my knowledge, in sports halls, in gyms, in the local GAA club – now I am not blaming the cuiditheoirí or the PCSP facilitators for that, but I wonder how much of that inservice was delivered in ordinary primary schools, in small primary schools, on wet days, outside, with no equipment and no facilities. I am also wondering, because I do know from talking to teachers who did the feedback forms and evaluations forms for those PCSP days, how much of that was fed back to the Department and how vehemently? I think every teacher in the country wrote that this is all wonderful but we are not going to be in a supersized GAA hall or rugby club or whatever it happens to be. How much of the message did the Department get just from those evaluation forms themselves?

Just a comment from somebody who is aged 50 plus VAT at the higher rate! I must say when I heard the comment this morning from Mary about age 50, the hairs stood at the back of my neck! I would just like to say that I keep up with my grandchildren, I am well able to run after them and I have no difficulty in going out to do PE. That is just a comment, thank you.

*Mary O’Sullivan, UL*

To those people in all seriousness my intent had nothing to do with age. I was actually using my own age, which I am 52, to say that you can have lots of enthusiasm at 50 and over and to anybody I insulted by that I am heartfully apologetic.

I just want to point out that this is the one area of the primary curriculum where I think parents and community have got to be brought on board. I don’t pack the lunch boxes of the kids’ sitting in front of me and while I might endorse healthy food and veg and all that, I am not responsible at the end of the day for what they eat. Also community based is the way to go for aquatics. We had a difference of opinion in our discussion and I, as a teacher, really do not want the responsibility of swimming. We don’t bring our kids swimming as there isn’t a pool near us. But I actually feel it should be pushed out into the community and all kids should be entitled to free swimming classes not just the privileged few.
I made a brief reference yesterday to forward planning. Mary mentioned this morning 60 minutes per week for PE and that she would love to see 60 minutes per day, and it just reminded me of our own school, which is in the fortunate position of having more facilities than most schools, in that we have a field, swimming pool and the yard. The problem is that in the yard the children are not allowed to run. Straight away you have 10 minutes small break and half an hour lunch time, 40 minutes PE gone! Because for the kids the natural thing is to get out there and run around, whereas for accident prevention those kids are not allowed tear around like they would like to do. I think when schools are being planned it wouldn’t cost a whole lot more to have reasonably safe surfaces where kids could run. It would be insisted on in a public park – you have to have a rubberised or a leafy surface, whatever. The same could be done in schools. It would cost a bit, but if it was in the initial planning stage it would work. Another thing that is happening is that there are lot of schools being built, particularly in larger areas, and the next thing space runs out and the PE hall is acquired straight away for a classroom. After that you will get your PE hall back but you have a few prefabs stuck in the yard and your outside space is reduced again, so we could do with a little bit more forward planning. On a different topic, could I just make a comment to Niall. I have a gripe with some of the third level colleges. When we were in Pat’s, and it is nearly 40 years since I was in Pat’s, as young lads going up to Dublin we thought it was heaven from the point of view of the facilities that were there. It had everything that you could want from the games point of view, except the swimming pool. It was the one thing we used to say it was a pity it wasn’t there. But now Pat’s has been attached to DCU, I presume they have claim on their facilities. But I feel a lot of the facilities up in the colleges are being run on a commercial basis and it is prohibitive for young students to join activity clubs up there. I know some of them are totally voluntary, but to use the gym and the swimming pool and everything in DCU, I think there is quite a hefty charge. The other area in the third level colleges is the diet. The restaurants are being run on a commercial basis and students are being charged high prices for low quality food. I think these are issues. I wonder to what extent those who direct and form education policy are on board and on message with what we have heard today. The experience in Northern Ireland, England and Wales, particularly at second level because of the proliferation of formal examinations, is very destructive for pupil and student involvement in sporting activities. Even in the primary sector, the emphasis we have had in recent years on formal assessment, which you are now about to bring in, and the obsession with formal testing and the distortion of the curriculum that results, has had an impact. We would have cases in schools where people have told me that parents actually monitor activity in the playground and if they see too many children in the playground for too long, they actually will complain. That is the sort of viewpoint that you have with formal testing. I am wondering is there going to be the same emphasis coming through from
those who form and direct the public’s view of what education is all about. Is that going to be as strong and as well informed as this gathering has been today?

**Michael Quealy, PCSP**

In response to the valid points made in relation to PCSP inservice days – no, we didn’t go out on wet days. We had plenty of equipment and a lot of the time we were based in hotels. The reason we were based in hotels was that there weren’t gym facilities available. In certain built up areas, Cork, Limerick Galway and Dublin we had access to school halls but I would be talking about school halls that would be very well equipped and would have plenty of space, so hopefully, that might answer your question. From my own experience and from talking to my own colleagues, a lot of the comments that were written down on the evaluation forms related to PE grants and facilities – mainly about halls. This came up in our discussion group earlier. There was a grant last year but this was a once off payment. This is something that I can’t influence unfortunately, but I would hope in the future. I would love to see an annual grant for PE but, unfortunately, I have no input into that.

**Sean Gallagher, PCSP**

I was part of the PCSP group and co-ordinator at the time that the decision was made to roll out seminars in gyms and halls because it was felt that teachers deserved to see PE in the way that it should be delivered. It is a challenge for schools to deliver PE with limited resources and facilities, but at the same time, you should pose that challenge to the cuiditheoir team who are there at the moment. Bring them to your schools and say “can you model a lesson for me” – not in a very argumentative way – but at the same way to show them the reality of what is there. But I think the message, perhaps, that needs to come from the seminar here is that the primary teaching profession is ready and willing to use the best possible facilities that can be offered. Don’t be using the lack of facilities as an excuse, and I am not saying that teachers are using it as an excuse, but show they are not being used as an excuse. Rather challenge what we would do in every school in the country if we had these facilities in place, so that you would almost have to demonstrate the need within the community for a community based facility. I was at a talk a number of years ago that showed the inverted level of funding of sports facilities – it is almost like a pyramid – the greatest number of children in primary school at the base of the pyramid, then there is a dropping off in secondary school and then a further dropping off in third level, but the level of funding for facilities was actually the other way round. The greatest level of funding was at third level, reduced for second level and even smaller for primary. I think that until such time that pyramid is straightened or the pyramid taken out of it completely and equitable funding comes into place, we should continue making our demands.
Milo Walsh

Niall, in light of your presentation, what do you think should be done immediately in terms of the powers that be?

Niall Moyna, DCU

That is certainly a loaded question. I have to take the comments that people expressed over the last ten minutes or so. It is very complex. As some teacher said, if she or he promotes healthy eating and the kid comes with a supersize lunch what can they do? Or if they promote physical activity at school and there are four Nintendo games at home, it is difficult. One of the things that I would like to say, and I don’t know if it is currently done, is that part of the report card, using those height and weight scales, you could send home to the parent what percentile the child is in. They should all be around the 50th. The reason I suggest this is that unfortunately, we tend to be ambulance chasers in Ireland, the problem arises and it is secondary prevention. What that would allow us to do is track – we have no objective data. You are stating for the last ten minutes that there is no funding. I can guarantee you that in five or 10 years time if you could show that there is a trend similar to that graph in the United States, believe you me, the health agencies, the Department of Education and the other agencies would get together a lot quicker. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence and it is primary prevention. You are giving the child and the parents some important information on their height and weight or even if it is not the school’s responsibility – empower the parents. Something as simple as that could have a phenomenal affect. I made this point to the Taoiseach last week – they don’t get elected on 20 year promises, no government gets elected on a 20 year promise. It will take a generation before we see the benefits. It is not instant gratification that we are looking for. It is deferred gratification, it is selfless what we are doing and I think the children expect us to do what we believe is best practice.

I think Niall Moyna’s speech and the statistics he showed us on obesity is the one thing that I will take away with me. It is absolutely frightening. Sentences like “Johnnie can you come out to eat”, ’50% of girls over 50 will get osteoporosis’, eyesight failure, limbs, kidneys, gall stones, allergic asthma – I think that is absolutely frightening and should be brought home to parents. When Niall said there should be a statistic or sten score for obesity on report cards, I think there should and parents would welcome it. There was a big hullabaloo from most delegates here, but I don’t see a problem – we are told to tell the parents of the sten scores of the Mirca-Ts and Sigma-Ts – why not give them a sten score for obesity. I think the sooner we wake up to this the better, because it is the future of our own children and it needs to be brought home. My school is an all boys’ school. There was a lot of bullying and different trouble on the yard and I just introduced this myself without any grants – because the big thing I am hearing from teachers is “we want grants”. I don’t think we need grants – it is just a
little initiative. In my own school, I have initiated, myself, activities organised from second to sixth. It is not an activity week as you saw on the chart – this is an activity year. It goes on every day. Kids from sixth class bring out footballs and cones and some basketballs each day of the year – we are lucky as we have an astro turf and a small football field and two large yards. It has taken extra teachers to supervise the astro turf – they go out voluntarily, because there are teachers who are on the yard supervising and there are others who supervise activities. I think it is time to get up and do something, so in my school there is generally not an obesity problem at the moment because the children are actively engaged in games. This thing of the children not being allowed to run or bump into each other – there have been zero accidents since I initiated this programme and it is now running about three years. Also the green schools initiative ties in very well with it. The fourth stage is on transport, the walking bus system and all that is quite a good link. I think teachers should bring home the message and maybe set up something simple. A recent course I was at was about games in the yard – just using chalk from Aldi, children going out and drawing circles, drawing squares, having some soft balls and playing games. Children have forgotten how to play. They don’t know how to play. They have to be taught again and it is up to teachers, maybe, to do that.

A fellow teacher said she is not packing the children’s lunches. Well, in my school, we are in theory. We are part of the DEIS programme and we provide lunches for the children. However, I’m sure other teachers would agree with me here, the price per head that we are getting per child for these healthy food items is not reflective of the cost that these healthy items are. So therefore, I am just wondering are the INTO fighting the Department to increase these prices in reflection of the cost of these healthy food items in our society today?

*Milo Walsh, Chair*

Could I just get a show of hands of how many delegates would be in favour of sten scores going home to parents about obesity? And those against? Ok, thanks very much.

I think there is an unanimous response here to the presentations and there is, I suppose, a mixture of shock and a sense of regret that we can’t do more in our schools, because everybody here wishes they could do more about it. So I hope now that the INTO, having run this Education Conference, will approach the Department of Education and Science and make a very strong presentation on the response from the ordinary delegates of this conference, because we can’t do it on our own. It is like any of the initiatives – we can only follow, we are the foot soldiers. I think it is very obvious from all of the presentations that what we need is a holistic approach. You can’t just tackle this and I am sure Niall would agree, you can’t tackle this on the basis of activity and ignore diet and ignore all the other factors. It has to be a holistic approach. In
our inservice, to be honest about it, there was a total emphasis on the activities. Maybe our inservice was geared towards the activities but certainly, I think that the balance has to be there in all of our inservice. There has to be a balance between the various component factors that are there. I would love if Niall allowed the INTO, in one of its publications, to reproduce some of those graphs, because I think they were fantastic. Some of the images that were there would strike a chord. We are a very small group here and to report back would be very difficult. We are also all very familiar, Niall, and I am sure you are as well, that running side by side with an over emphasis on obesity there is also the fear of bulimia and all eating disorders. If we are going to approach this and be in your face about it, as you would like us to be, and I think that it is good, but I think we will have to consider all aspects. Depression is another aspect – as you said that is not your area – that is the area of the psychologists, but that has to be built into it. But overall, I would like to thank everybody for their contributions. I think the presentations by everybody were fantastic and in particular, I was very taken by the graphs that came up on Niall’s presentation and I would love if they could be reproduced, as they would be a huge help for us when we go back to our staffs, to get the staffs on board because this stuff is in your face. These are facts.

Deirbhile Nic Craith

I would like to say that the issues we bring up at this Conference will be presented to the Department of Education. In addition, we will be publishing the proceedings of the conference. Hopefully, we will also see some motions coming to Congress – trying to pursue the policy issue in relation to what is needed to promote physical education in schools.

Milo Walsh

Niall is just saying to me that it is not obesity scores but BMI scores. Following on from the speaker from West Clare, I believe, maybe, that it is part of the SUV culture at the moment. We have people recycling but going to the recycling unit in big gas guzzling motor. Likewise, we are bringing kids to play activities in big SUVs and taking them into fast food venues afterwards instead of having them cycling or walking to the various venues. I think, maybe, the Department of Justice has a role to play in making the streets safer so that people can be active and out there rather than being ferried here and there in gas guzzling machines.

There are over 700 members in Craobh Chualann and there are only four of us here, so I would like to agree with the previous speaker who said that he would like to tell everybody else what we heard here. I wondered if the specialist speakers, who have obviously been videoed, if their speeches could be made available online. It would be wonderful if our whole staff next Wednesday could look at Niall Moyna’s speech.
**Milo Walsh**

They will be available on the webcast on the INTO website.

Just a suggestion maybe with regards to the percentile for BMI or obesity, could it not be handed over to the HSE and when the school nurse comes, as well as checking the child’s hearing and their sight, it wouldn’t be rocket science to include a sten score or a percentile for BMI.

**Milo Walsh**

I would like to thank all members of the panel and all the delegates who posed questions for their contribution. I would also like to thank you all for your participation.
Foreword

These proceedings of the Consultative Conference on Education were published in CD format. The decision to publish on CD for the first time reflects our belief in the potential of technology in education. The CD format allows readers to access linked resources and websites mentioned in the report. In addition, it allows all three topics discussed at the Consultative Conference of 2007 to be published in one volume. Additional copies were published in printed format for the INTO library and archive.

Since the 1970s the INTO has published reports on aspects of the curriculum in the primary school. This work was influential in shaping the Primary School Curriculum of 1999. In this printed volume, we consider Physical Education in the Primary School. Approaches to Teaching and Learning and School Governance are covered in the other two volumes.

I would like to thank the Education Committee for preparing the background report presented here and for their work in organising the highly successful consultative conference on education. They are supported by the Education Section team in Head Office, led ably by Deirbhile Nic Craith, Senior Official. I would also like to thank our publications team who prepared the CD. Our guest speakers at the conference deserve our special thanks for sharing their expertise with us on approaches to teaching and PE. In particular, I wish to thank our keynote speaker?

I hope that this report will contribute to the growing research on aspects of primary education in Ireland. The INTO will continue to ensure that the voice of teachers remains central in policy-making in education through our involvement in the preparation of reports and the organisation of consultative conferences for our members.

John Carr, MA (Ed)
General Secretary
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